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THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

THE

GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

A GERMAN APPRECIATION OF THE
FIRST EDITION OF
THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

BY PROF. DR. FR. SUSEMIHL

TRANSLATED FROM THE

‘BERICHT ÜBER ARISTOTELES UND THEOPHRASTUS
FÜR DAS JAHR 1883’

Where the question is not of systems but of the tendencies of thought in theory and practice, as in the case of the Sophists and Socrates, as also in his criticism of Aristotle, the author differs widely from Zeller. Here we find a vision of vast comprehensiveness and depth and are most favourably impressed by the extraordinary gifts of a writer standing on the highest level of contemporary culture and exercising an easy mastery over the most diversified branches of knowledge. . . . The chapter on *The Place of Socrates in Greek Philosophy* seems to me the most important in the whole work and the most deserving of attention from its historians. . . . By none perhaps till now have the flaws in Aristotle's logic been so accurately discerned and understood; none before has so luminously explained why it omitted to deal with hypothetical and disjunctive reasonings. The idea that Aristotle was led to the presentation of his categories by examining the common forms of interrogation is also most remarkable. . . . But the author's general characterisation of Aristotle's intellect is equally original and accurate. With magnificent powers of observation, memory and intelligence and a faculty for abstraction such as perhaps no other human being ever possessed, he was still, as Mr. Benn justly observes, better able to classify and describe the surfaces of things than to penetrate into and explain their inner meaning. He lacked the faculties of divination and prophecy, the revolutionary vigour, and the scientific imagination that are so potent both for good and evil in his critic.

THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

BY
ALFRED WILLIAM BENN

AUTHOR OF 'THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH RATIONALISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY,'
'REVALUATIONS,' ETC.

SECOND EDITION CORRECTED AND PARTLY RE-WRITTEN

Εὐρηκέναι μὲν οὖν τινὰς τῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ μακαρίων φιλοσόφων
τὸ ἀληθὲς δεῖ νομίζειν· τίνες δὲ οἱ τυχόντες μάλιστα καὶ πῶς ἂν
καὶ ἡμῖν σύνεσις περὶ τούτων γένοιτο ἐπισκέψασθαι προσήκει

PLOTINUS

Quamquam ab his philosophiam et omnes ingenuas disciplinas
habemus : sed tamen est aliquid quod nobis non liceat, liceat illis

CICERO



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THE
GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

BY
ALFRED WILLIAM BENN

SECOND EDITION CORRECTED AND PARTLY REWRITTEN

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TO THE
REV. ALFRED FAWKES, M.A.

BUT FOR WHOSE KIND INTEREST IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN
ATTEMPTED, THIS NEW EDITION OF THE GREEK
PHILOSOPHERS IS GRATEFULLY
AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

IN the present edition of this work the most important changes both as regards matter and form have been made in the part dealing with early Greek thought, which has been extended from one chapter to two. I have come to see that with the first founders of philosophy moral and religious questions occupy a much larger space in proportion to physical science than I and others besides me once supposed. Accordingly what I had to say about the evolution of Greek religion in its earliest known stages has been transferred from the chapter on the Sophists to a place near the beginning of the book; the fundamental antithesis between the Olympian and Chthonian deities being, however, still expressed in the terms originally employed. The subject, first popularised in England by Walter Pater, is one that Miss J. E. Harrison has since then made peculiarly her own, illustrating it with a scholarship to which I have not the remotest pretension. Nevertheless Miss Harrison has not persuaded me to accept her depreciatory view, very surprising in so accomplished a Hellenist, of the Olympian divinities; and I still adhere to my original conviction that the best elements in Orphicism, or whatever else the reformed faith of the sixth century is to be called, were due to the elevating influence exercised by the more aristocratic and expansive on the more gloomy and puritanical theology. And it seems to me that both Heracleitus and the great Italiote philosophers together with Pindar and Aeschylus were inspired more by the faiths of life and light than by the faiths of darkness and death.

Passing to questions of a more positive and verifiable character, I have adopted against Zeller the new chronology, now generally accepted, which places Heracleitus before instead of after Parmenides; and I have proposed a new explanation, quite different from any previously offered, of the Atomic theory.

The title of my third chapter 'Nature and Law,' draws

attention to what seems to have been the most distinctively original idea of the book when it first appeared, namely that the Sophists were not, what Grote still supposed them to be, conservative teachers, but on the contrary, as their contemporaries rightly divined, revolutionists, only revolutionists for good rather than for evil. My interpretation of their aims has received the valuable adhesion of Prof. Chiapelli of Rome,¹ and I am told that the late Prof. D. G. Ritchie of St. Andrews used to recommend it warmly to his pupils. On the other hand I must mention that the most generous and appreciative of all my critics, the late Prof. Fr. Susemihl, refused to accept it. 'Brilliant,' he observes, 'as is the whole construction and much truth as it contains, still it rests on ruinous and sandy foundations. For in the first place Prodicus and Hippias are given an exaggerated importance not justified by the facts; and in the second place it stands or falls with the assumption that Protagoras and Gorgias did not write their philosophical works till late in life. Now, as regards Protagoras this assumption is, to say the least of it, uncertain, while as regards Gorgias it is indubitably false.' It seems to me that Susemihl's criticism itself involves assumptions more unwarrantable than mine. To begin with, it begs the very question at issue, which is: What was the essential teaching of Prodicus and Hippias? My contention is that they founded what I call the physiocratic school of thought from which Plato learned much, as I have proved in the note at the end of the chapter on his Metaphysics; that their ideas were taken up first by the Cynics and then by the Stoics, to be revived long afterwards during the philosophical Renaissance, and to become, as Sir Henry Maine has shown, a revolutionary instrument of unequalled potency in the hands of Rousseau and his successors. For the importance of Prodicus we have the direct, contemporary, and unprejudiced evidence of Aristophanes who declares him alone among contemporary teachers of astronomy to be worthy of consideration for intelligence and wisdom, besides the generally admitted testimony of the Xenophontic Socrates to the high distinction of his moral lessons—lessons that I have shown to be clearly based on the idea of Natural Law. As for Hippias his fame has grown so much since Susemihl wrote that the eminent historian Prof. Julius Beloch goes much beyond my estimate

¹ *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. iii., pp. 1-22 and 240-275, 'Per la storia della Sofistica greca.'

when, referring to his idea of human brotherhood, whence the Sophistic opposition to slavery was derived, he declares that this alone would be enough, as regards ethics, to place the Sophists infinitely higher than Socrates and his whole school.

Let us now take the question of literary priority as between the naturalists and the humanists. I demur to Susemihl's contention that my whole case stands or falls with the assumption that Protagoras and Gorgias wrote their books late in life. For the essential part of my case is that the Sophists, so far from following each his own line as Grote thought, or agreeing only in the negation of all certainty metaphysical, moral or scientific, as the continental historians mostly think, were really divided into two schools respectively advocating the claims of Nature and of Law, or rather Convention, to be followed as guides in morality; that these opposing standards were subsequently perverted into an apology for the right of the stronger on the one hand and for utter moral scepticism on the other; while a better morality than naturalism alone or humanism alone could furnish was evolved from the synthesis of both, just as the highest religion arose from an alliance between the Chthonian and the Olympian faiths. It is a point well worthy of historical investigation which creed came first, but its decision leaves untouched the more important question, were there any such creeds at all? So also the radical opposition between Heracleitus and Parmenides remains unaffected and the attempts to reconcile them are equally interesting, whether we agree with Zeller's dates for them or not. In fact when I wrote my book on the *Philosophy of Greece* I returned to the traditional order, putting Protagoras and the Humanists first without any derogation to the fundamental antithesis first formulated in this work.

However, on reconsidering the whole subject I have come to think that the order originally followed in the chapter on the Sophists is not only the most convenient for purposes of exposition but has also more to be said for it than Susemihl will allow. It is not clear that Protagoras wrote any book in his life but the one that involved him in a charge of irreligion in his seventieth year, nor that this was published until just before that date. The phrase, 'life is too short for such difficult investigations,' namely as to whether the gods do or do not exist, may well refer not to the shortness of life in general but rather to the writer's own advanced age. Nor is it clear that the theory of human progress

as opposed to a golden age of nature when all men were just and good, put into his mouth by Plato, was contained in this or any work of the humanist Sophist's. All we know is that at the time of its supposed delivery he was, according to Plato, an old man. And the same authority gives us to understand that Hippias was at this same date already in complete possession of his distinction between Nature and Nomos (in the sense of a man-made rule). So there is nothing to prove that the Naturalism of the Sophist of Elis originated in a reaction against the Protagorean dictum that 'man is the measure of all things,' and not rather the reverse, Nature coming first and the human standard of social expediency afterwards.

Next as regards the work of Gorgias *On Nature or Nothing* it may or may not have been intended as a protest against the physiocrats. I merely suggest that it was without being so rash as to stake my whole case on the accuracy of such a surmise or admitting that the two "stand or fall together." *A fortiori* it is not a matter of vital importance to my theory at what exact date Gorgias wrote the treatise referred to. But at the same time I must point out that Susemihl is not justified in affirming that 'beyond doubt' it was not written in his old age. I presume that my critic—who gives no authority—is referring to the statement of Olympiodôrus that it was written in the 84th Olympiad (440-444 B.C.). The commentator in question lived from late in the fifth century to early in the sixth century A.D.; that is not much under a thousand years later, which alone would make his evidence of very doubtful value. What is more the time mentioned agrees exactly with the *floruit* of Empedocles, whose disciple Gorgias is said on as good evidence to have been. Now it seems incredible that a disciple should, at the very meridian of his master's reputation, have advanced a series of theses tending to knock that master's whole philosophy on the head. Another improbability is that if the nihilist treatise had appeared so early it should never have been mentioned or even alluded to by Aristophanes, by the Xenophontic Socrates, or by Plato, the earliest extant reference to it occurring in the *Encomium Helenae* of Isocrates, assigned by Jebb to 370 B.C. And even admitting the extreme improbability of so early a date as 440, there is no insuperable obstacle to believing that the naturalistic morality might have been formulated even so long ago as then. For there is something very like it in the *Antigonê* of Sophocles

(lines 450-457) produced in that very year. And these lines are, referred to by Aristotle, notwithstanding their religious colouring, as an illustration of what is meant by natural right (*Rhetor.*, i., 13, 2).

Finally I have to observe that Gomperz has independently followed the same order of exposition, discussing Prodicus and Hippias before Protagoras and Gorgias, though without giving any reason for this arrangement.

In a note at the end of my chapter on the Sophists I have attempted a conjectural restoration of the cosmology of Prodicus referred to in the *Birds* of Aristophanes. It may at least serve to emphasise the fact that Prodicus was something more than the hair-splitting verbal pedant held up to everlasting ridicule in Plato's *Protagoras* and accepted in all good faith as such and no more by successive generations of German pedants to whom even the broadest distinctions of fact are invisible.

The only addition to the chapter on Socrates is a Note on some recent attempts to apologise for the vilest attack on reason Europe has ever seen.

The chapter on Plato's *Metaphysics* is in great part new. It contains a discussion of Plato's ideal theory to which the attention of Platonic experts is earnestly invited in the hope that they will not reject it without examination as not being the work of a university Professor.

The same plea may be urged on behalf of a new attempt to solve the most difficult problem in Aristotle's philosophy, the meaning of what I have called the constructive reason in the famous fifth chapter of book iii. of his treatise on *The Soul*, and also for a Note at the end of the volume dealing with his theory of tragic emotion in the *Poetics*.

With the exception of trifling corrections and of a note on Epicureanism and Natural Law the sections on post-Aristotelian philosophy are reprinted as they originally stood, nothing having since appeared—at least to my knowledge—that necessitated any modification in the opinions there expressed.

To gain room for the numerous additions made in this edition a chapter on 'Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought' has been left out as not contributing anything of importance to the interpretation of the ancients whatever light it might throw on more modern speculations.

FROM PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE subject of Greek philosophy is so vast that, in England at least, it has become customary to deal with it in detached portions rather than as a connected whole. This method has its advantages, but it has also its drawbacks. The critic who singles out some one thinker for special study is apt to exaggerate the importance of his hero and to credit him with the origination of principles which were really borrowed from his predecessors. Moreover, the appearance of a new idea can only be made intelligible by tracing the previous tendencies which it either continues, combines, or contradicts. In a word, the history of philosophy has itself a philosophy which requires that we should go beyond particular phenomena and view them as variously related parts of a single system.

The history of Greek philosophy, whether conceived in this comprehensive sense or as an erudite investigation into matters of detail, is a province which the Germans have made peculiarly their own; and, among German scholars, Dr. Zeller is the one who has treated it with most success. My obligations to his great work are sufficiently shown by the copious references to it which occur throughout the following pages. It is in those instances—and they are, unfortunately, very numerous—where our knowledge of particular philosophers and of their opinions rests on fragmentary or second-hand information, that I have found his assistance most valuable. This has especially been the case with reference to the pre-Socratic schools, the minor successors of Socrates, the earlier Stoics, the Sceptics, and the later Pythagoreans. I must, however, guard against the supposition that my work is, in any respect, a popularisation or abridgment of Zeller's. To popularise Zeller would, indeed, be an impertinence, for nothing can be more luminous and interesting than his style and general mode of exposition. Nor am I

playing the part of a finder to a large telescope ; for my point of view by no means coincides with that of the learned German historian. Thus, while my limits have obliged me to be content with a very summary treatment of many topics which he has discussed at length, there are others, and those, in my opinion, not the least important, to which he has given less space than will be found allotted to them here. On several questions, also, I have ventured to controvert his opinions, notably with reference to the Sophists, Socrates, Aristotle, and Plotinus. My general way of looking at the Greeks and their philosophy also differs from his. And the reasons which have led me to follow an independent course in this respect involve considerations of such interest and importance, that I shall take the liberty of specifying them in some detail.

Stated briefly, Zeller's theory of ancient thought is that the Greeks originally lived in harmony with nature ; that the bond was broken by philosophy and particularly by the philosophy of Socrates ; that the discord imperfectly overcome by Plato and Aristotle revealed itself once more in the unreconciled, self-concentrated subjectivity of the later schools ; that this hopeless estrangement, after reaching its climax in the mysticism of the Neo-Platonists, led to the complete collapse of independent speculation ; and that the creation of a new consciousness by the advent of Christianity and of the Germanic races was necessary in order to the successful resumption of scientific enquiry. Zeller began as a Hegelian, and it seems to me that he retained far too much of the Hegelian formalism in his historical constructions. The well-worked antithesis between object and subject, even after being revised in a positivist sense, is totally inadequate to the burden laid on it by this theory ; and if we want really to understand the causes which first hampered, then arrested, and finally paralysed Greek philosophy, we must seek for them in a more concrete order of considerations. Zeller, with perfect justice, attributes the failure of Plato and Aristotle to their defective observation of nature and their habit of regarding the logical combinations of ideas derived from the common use of words as an adequate representative of the relations obtaining among things in themselves. But it seems an extremely strained and artificial explanation to say that their shortcomings in this respect were due to a confusion of the objective and the subjective, consequent on the imperfect separation of the Greek

mind from nature—a confusion, it is added, which only the advent of a new religion and a new race could overcome.¹ It is unfair to make Hellenism as a whole responsible for fallacies which might easily be paralleled in the works of modern metaphysicians; and the unfairness will become still more evident when we remember that, after enjoying the benefit of Christianity and Germanism for a thousand years, the modern world had still to take its first lessons in patience of observation, in accuracy of reasoning, and in sobriety of expression from such men as Thucydides and Hippocrates, Polybius, Archimêdes and Hipparchus. Even had the Greeks as a nation been less keen to distinguish between illusion and reality than their successors up to the sixteenth century—a supposition notoriously the reverse of true—it would still have to be explained why Plato and Aristotle, with their prodigious intellects, went much further astray than their predecessors in the study of nature. And this Zeller's method does not explain at all.

Again, I think that Zeller quite misconceives the relation between Greek philosophy and Greek life when he attributes the intellectual decline of the post-Aristotelian period, in part at least, to the simultaneous ruin of public spirit and political independence. The degeneracy of poetry and art, of eloquence and history, may perhaps be accounted for in this way, but not the relaxation of philosophical activity. On the contrary, the disappearance of political interests was of all conditions the most favourable to speculation, as witness the Ionians, Democritus, and Aristotle. Had the independence and power of the great city-republics been prolonged much further, it is probable—as the example of the Sophists and Socrates seems to show—that philosophy would have become still more absorbingly moral and practical than it actually became in the Stoic, Epicurean, and Sceptical schools. And theoretical studies did, in fact, receive a great impulse from the Macedonian conquest, a large fund of intellectual energy being diverted from public affairs to the pursuit of knowledge, only it took the direction of positive science rather than of general speculation.²

¹ *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, iv., pp. 5 sq.

² Polybius observes (iii., 59) that 'men of practical experience in affairs being released [by the Macedonian and Roman conquests] from the cares of martial or political ambition have had excellent opportunities for research and enquiry' (Shuckburgh's translation, i., 218). The reference is in the first instance to geographical research; but the same cause would operate in other directions also. Compare Macaulay's

The cause which first arrested and finally destroyed the free movement of Greek thought was not any intrinsic limitation or corruption of the Greek genius, but the ever-increasing preponderance of two interests, both tending, although in different ways and different degrees, to strengthen the principle of authority and to enfeeble the principle of reason. One was the theological interest, the other was the scholastic interest. The former was the more conspicuous and the more mischievous of the two. From the persecution of Anaxagoras to the prohibition of philosophical teaching by Justinian, we may trace the rise and spread of a reaction towards superstition, sometimes advancing and sometimes receding, but, on the whole, gaining ground from age to age, until from the noontide splendour of Pericles we pass to that long night which stretches in almost impenetrable darkness down to the red and stormy daybreak of the Crusades. And it was a reaction which extended through all classes, including the philosophers themselves. It seems to me that where the Athenian school, from Socrates on, fall short of their predecessors, as in some points they unquestionably do, their inferiority is largely due to this cause. Its influence is very perceptible in weakening the speculative energies of those who stand at the greatest distance from the popular beliefs. It was because dislike for theology occupied so large a place in the thoughts of Epicurus and his disciples, that they valued science only as a refutation of its teaching, instead of regarding it simply as an obstacle to be removed from the path of enquiry. More than this; they became infected with the spirit of that against which they fought, and their absolute indifference to truth was the shadow which it cast on their minds.

The theological interest and the scholastic interest, though not necessarily associated, have, as already observed, a point of contact in their common exaltation of authority. Thus, for our present purpose they may be classified under the more general notion of traditionalism. By this term I understand a disposition to accept as true opinions received either by the mass of mankind or by the best accredited teachers, and to throw these

observation on the great development of English science under the Restoration: 'The torrent which had been dammed up in one channel rushed violently into another. The revolutionary spirit ceasing to operate in politics, began to exert itself with unprecedented vigour and hardihood in every department of physics' (*History of England*, vol. i., p. 407, 3rd ed.).

opinions into a form adapted for easy transmission to others. In this sense, traditionalism is Janus-faced, looking on one side to the past and on the other to the future. Now philosophy could only gain general acceptance by becoming a tradition. For a long time the Greek thinkers busied themselves almost exclusively with the discovery of truth, remaining comparatively indifferent to its diffusion. As Plato says, they went their own way without caring whether they took us along with them or not.¹ And it was at this period that the most valuable speculative ideas were first originated. At last a strong desire arose among the higher classes to profit by the results of the new learning, and a class of men came into existence whose profession was to gratify this desire. But the Sophists, as they were called, soon found that lessons in the art of life were more highly appreciated and more liberally rewarded than lessons in the constitution of nature. Accordingly, with the facile ingenuity of Greeks, they set to work proving, first that nature could not be known, and finally that there was no such thing as nature at all. The real philosophers were driven to secure their position by a change of front. They became teachers themselves, disguising their lessons, however, under the form of a search after truth undertaken conjointly with their friends, who, of course, were not expected to pay for the privilege of giving their assistance, and giving it for so admirable a purpose. In this co-operative system, the person who led the conversation was particularly careful to show that his conclusions followed directly from the admissions of his interlocutors, being, so to speak, latent in their minds, and only needing a little obstetric assistance on his part to bring them into the light of day. And the better to rivet their attention, he chose for the subject of discussion questions of human interest, or else, when the conversation turned to physical phenomena, he led the way towards a teleological or aesthetical interpretation of their meaning.

Thus, where Zeller says that the Greek philosophers confounded the objective with the subjective because they were still imperfectly separated from nature, we seem to have come on a less ambitious but more intelligible explanation of the facts, and one capable of being stated with as much generality as his. Not only among the Greeks but everywhere, culture is more or less antagonistic to originality, and the diffusion to the enlargement

¹ *Sophists*, 243, A.

of knowledge. Thought is like water; when spread over a wider surface it is apt to become stagnant and shallow. When ideas could only live on the condition of being communicated to a large circle of listeners, they were necessarily adapted to the taste and lowered to the comprehension of relatively vulgar minds. And not only so, but the habit of taking their opinions and prejudices as the starting-point of every enquiry frequently led to the investment of those opinions and prejudices with the formal sanction of a philosophical demonstration. It was held that education consisted less in the acquisition of new truth than in the elevation to clearer consciousness of truths that had all along been dimly perceived.

To the criticism and systematisation of common language and common opinion succeeded the more laborious criticism and systematisation of philosophical theories. Such an enormous amount of labour was demanded for the task of working up the materials amassed by Greek thought during the period of its creative originality, and accommodating them to the popular belief, that not much could be done in the way of adding to their extent. Nor was this all. Among the most valuable ideas of the earlier thinkers were those which stood in most striking opposition to the evidence of the senses. As such they were excluded from the system which had for its object the reorganisation of philosophy on the basis of general consent. Thus not only did thought tend to become stationary, but it even abandoned some of the ground that had been formerly won.

Not that the vitality of Hellenic reason gave away simultaneously at every point. The same independent spirit, the same imaginative vigour which had carried physical speculation to such splendid conquests during the first two centuries of its existence were manifested with equal effect when the energies previously devoted to nature as a whole concentrated themselves on the study of conduct and belief. It was thus that Socrates could claim the whole field of human life for scientific treatment, and create the method by which it has ever since been most successfully studied. It was thus that Plato could analyse and ideally reconstruct all practices, institutions, and beliefs. It was thus that Aristotle, while definitely arresting the progress of research, could still complete the method and create the language through which the results of new research have been established, recognised, and communicated ever since. It was thus that the

Stoics advanced from paradox to paradox until they succeeded in co-ordinating morality for all time by reference to the three fundamental ideas of personal conscience, individual obligation, and universal humanity. And not only were dialectics and ethics at first animated by the same enterprising spirit as speculative physics, but their very existence as recognised studies must be ascribed to its decay, to the revolution through which philosophy, from being purely theoretical, became social and didactic. While in some directions thought was made stationary and even retrogressive by the very process of its diffusion, in other directions this diffusion was the cause of its more complete development. Finally, ethics and logic were reduced to a scholastic routine, and progress continued to be made only in the positive sciences, until, here also, it was brought to an end by the triumph of superstition and barbarism combined.

If the cessation of speculative activity among the Greeks needs to be accounted for by something more definite than phrases about the objective and the subjective, so also does its resumption among the nations of modern Europe. This may be explained by two different circumstances—the disappearance of the obstacles which had long opposed themselves to the free exercise of reason, and the stimulus given to enquiry by the Copernican astronomy. After spreading over the whole basin of the Mediterranean, Hellenic culture had next to repair the ravages of the barbarians, and, chiefly under the form of Christianity, to make itself accepted by the new nationalities which had risen on the ruins of the Roman empire. So arduous a task was sufficient to engross, during many centuries, the entire intellectual energies of western Europe. At last the extreme limits of diffusion were provisionally reached, and thought once more became available for the discovery of new truth. Simultaneously with this consummation, the great supernaturalist reaction, having also reached its extreme limits, had so far subsided, that nature could once more be studied on scientific principles, with less freedom, indeed, than in old Ionia, but still with tolerable security against the vengeance of interested or fanatical opponents. And at the very same conjuncture it was shown by the accumulated observations of many ages that the conception of the universe on which the accepted philosophy rested must be replaced by one of a directly opposite description. I must confess that in this vast revolution the relation between

the objective and the subjective, as reconstituted by Christianity and the Germanic genius, does not seem to me to have played a very prominent part.

If Zeller's semi-Hegelian theory of history does scant justice to the variety and complexity of causes determining the evolution of philosophy, it also draws away attention from the ultimate elements, the matter, in an Aristotelian sense, of which that evolution consists. By this I mean the development of particular ideas as distinguished from the systems into which they enter as component parts. Often the formation of a system depends on an accidental combination of circumstances, and therefore cannot be brought under any particular law of progress, while the ideas out of which it is constructed exhibit a perfectly regular advance on the form under which they last appeared. Others, again, are characterised by a remarkable fixity which enables them to persist unchanged through the most varied combinations and the most protracted intervals of time. But when each system is regarded as, so to speak, an organic individual, the complete and harmonious expression of some one phase of thought, and the entire series of systems as succeeding one another in strict logical order according to some simple law of evolution, there will be a certain tendency to regard the particular elements of each as determined by the character of the whole to which they belong, rather than by their intrinsic nature and antecedent history. And I think it is owing to this limitation of view that Zeller has not illustrated, so fully as could be desired, the subtler references by which the different schools of philosophy are connected with one another and also with the literature of their own and other times.

My obligations to other writers have been acknowledged throughout this work, so far as I was conscious of them, and so far as they could be defined by reference to specific points. I take the present opportunity for mentioning in a more general way the valuable assistance that I have derived from Schwegler's *Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie*, Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus*, and Dühring's *Geschichte der Philosophie*. The parallel between Socrates, Giordano Bruno, and Spinoza was probably suggested to me by Dühring, as also were some points in my characterisation of Aristotle. As my view of the position occupied by Lucretius with respect to religion and philosophy differs in many important points from that of Prof. Sellar, it is

the more incumbent on me, to state that, but 'for a perusal of Prof. Sellar's eloquent and sympathetic chapters on the great Epicurean poet, my own estimate of his genius would certainly not have been written in its present form and would probably not have been written at all.

On the whole, I fear that my acquaintance with the modern literature of the subject will be found rather limited for an undertaking like the present. But I do not think that wider reading in that direction would have much furthered the object I had in view. That object has been to exhibit the principal ideas of Greek philosophy in the closest possible connexion with the characters of their authors, with each other, with the parallel tendencies of literature and art, with the history of religion, of physical science, and of civilisation as a whole. To interpret all things by a system of universal references is the method of philosophy; when applied to a series of events this method is the philosophy of history; when the events are ideas, it is the philosophy of philosophy itself.

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THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

1504

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CHAPTER I

EARLY GREEK THOUGHT—I

I

DURING the two centuries that ended with the close of the Peloponnesian war, a single race, weak numerically, and weakened still further by political disunion, simultaneously developed all the highest human faculties to an extent possibly rivalled but certainly not surpassed by the collective efforts of that vastly greater population which now wields the accumulated resources of modern Europe. This race, while maintaining a precarious foothold on the shores of the Mediterranean by repeated prodigies of courage and genius, contributed a new element to civilisation which has been the mainspring of all subsequent progress, but which, as it expanded into wider circles and encountered an increasing resistance from without, unavoidably lost some of the enormous elasticity that characterised its earliest and most concentrated reaction. It was the just boast of the Greek that to Asiatic refinement and Thracian valour he joined a disinterested thirst for knowledge unshared by his neighbours on either side.¹ And, as Aristotle reminds us, a similar distinction obtained among the Greeks themselves. He does not name the Ionian race to which he himself belonged ; but we must suppose that when he refers to those Greeks in whom energy and intelligence were happily combined, this race was especially present to his thoughts, including of course the Athenians whom friends and foes alike counted as being of Ionian stock.

Among the gifts that we owe to the Ionian race philosophy is the greatest. The word and the thing are their creation ; and it is to their teachers that we must first go for an explanation of what the name and notion mean. With their concrete

¹ Plato, *Rep.* iv., 435, E ; Aristotle, *Pol.* vii., 1327, b., 29.

way of looking at things the question originally was not, what is philosophy? but what is the philosopher? Pythagoras, we are told, defined him as one who loves knowledge for its own sake, interesting himself in the world simply as so much material for contemplation and intelligence; while Plato more grandly calls him the spectator of all time and all existence.¹ But although the desire and to some extent the possession of knowledge enter largely into the idea of philosophy, for the Greeks as for us it has always included something more than an encyclopaedic grasp of facts—even if such an achievement were possible to man. Therefore from the very first philosophy has been understood to mean not so much a knowledge of particular as of general truths. A philosopher asks either what is the permanent substance of things? or, if the universe is found to be in a perpetual process of change, by what principle is its evolution determined? Nor is this enough. From a very early period philosophy went beyond mere speculation and claimed to have a voice in practice, enquiring not only what actually is, but also what is the ideally best that can be. Indeed the two passions, the passion for truth and the passion for goodness, have at all times perpetually acted and reacted on one another. And we find this development of thought particularly noticeable in the two illustrious thinkers that I have just quoted as apparently taking a purely intellectual view of the philosophic ideal. For Pythagoras and Plato were above all Social reformers, desiring knowledge as an instrument for the reconstruction of society on a rational basis; while again they conceived the world, the one, Pythagoras, as a *Cosmos*, an ordered whole, the other, Plato, as a realm of ends, eternally created by the supreme Idea of Good.

Philosophy so understood has obvious connexions with positive science, with practical life, and with religion; with science as supplying the materials to be wrought up into a systematic whole; with practical life, especially under the form of legislation, as a field for the realisation of new ideals; with religion—or at any rate with its more advanced theological forms—as offering a systematised view of the world, its constitution, and its origin. All three interests are more or less represented in Greek philosophy; but as regards the religious reference we have to note for the better appreciation of what follows that Greek philosophy, at least in its earlier forms, offers a marked contrast to medieval thought, which was entirely devoted to the confirmation and defence of Catholic dogma; and even to modern thought, which has continued the same apologetic work, so far at any rate as pure theism goes; while the Greeks alike in their theories of existence and of

¹ Laertius Diogenes, viii., 6; Plato, *Rep.* 486, A.

conduct took up an attitude either of hostile criticism or of radical reform towards the reigning polytheistic beliefs.

So much being premised, I propose to devote the opening chapters of this work to a review of the first, or what is called the pre-Sophistic period of Greek thought. It is largely concerned with questions relating to the origin and constitution of the external universe; but by no means so exclusively as was assumed by the historians of the last century. Almost from the dawn of speculation we shall find questions relating to knowledge and conduct cropping up; while again the lines of physical enquiry will be seen to prolong themselves into the post-Sophistic ages, with occasional revivals of the earlier solutions proposed.

In discussing these earlier speculations, I do not propose to enter into minute details of interpretation, still less into the controversies excited by the contending views of specialists. What I am writing offers itself chiefly as a study in the evolution of thought; and to understand this the important thing is to discover what each philosopher conceived to be the meaning of his predecessor rather than what that predecessor really meant. In most cases the two are likely to agree, but if they differ the former is incomparably more important than the latter. And more attention will be given to those vast generalisations which in Plato's words, cover all time and all existence, than to the crude guesses which were sometimes already antiquated at the date of their publication.

II

It was a saying of Hegel's that the bird of Pallas only flies abroad when the shades of night are closing in. In plainer language, the function of philosophy is not to anticipate the work of coming ages but to furnish an ideal expression for the age that is nearing its end. That may be true of Hegel's own system and of other systems that the nineteenth century has bequeathed to us. And it has been true at all times of some great literary works both in poetry and prose. But it is not true of early Greek thought, whose notes have more affinity with the lark than with the owl. What fascinates us in its chief exponents is the wonderful sagacity of their forecasts, the bold speculative outlines they have sketched for the coming centuries—or rather the coming millenniums—to complete and fill in.

According to the unanimous testimony of antiquity, the founder of Greek philosophy, in other words, of all philosophy, was Thales of Milêtus, the leading Ionian city of what we now call Asia Minor or Anatolia—the land of the rising sun.

Thales counted among the seven wise men of Greece, but his wisdom did not come from the East, nor has the notion that he was a Semite been made good. It is, however, only reasonable to conjecture that his intellectual curiosity received a powerful stimulus from the treasures and the traditions of Egypt which had been thrown open to the Milesians a little before his time; while the overland communications with Babylon would give access to the astronomical records on which the astrological calculations of her priests were founded. But the wisdom of Thales lay in his power to disentangle the facts of mathematics and astronomy from the superstitions with which they had been associated by the Oriental priesthoods, placing them in a new scheme of purely scientific observation and reasoning. Thus we are told that he demonstrated various propositions in geometry, and that he predicted—probably by an empirical method—a solar eclipse which occurred in 585 B.C. As a practical man also he is said to have suggested a plan for the military confederation of the Ionian cities which, unfortunately for themselves, they did not accept.

It is not, however, as a scientific or political genius that Thales has lived in the history of thought. He is immortalised for having said that the principle of all things was water. For by so saying he, so far as in him lay, put an end to the mythological explanations of nature previously current, replacing them by an explanation based on experience and more or less verifiable within its limits. A shrewd critic, Walter Bagehot, has humorously observed that such a theory could hardly account for pea-soup, much less for a solid rock. But solid rocks are dissoluble in water and are formed anew from its deposits. The pregnant Ionian idea was to trace an immutable substance through all material transformations, with the resulting substitution of a belief in evolution for a belief in creation. We know not whether Thales consciously placed himself in opposition to the religious mythology of the poets; but a saying of his has been preserved that may be interpreted as bearing on some such reference of the new theory to the old. 'All things,' he declared, 'are full of gods.' May we not see in this the evasion of a timid or captious objection, as for instance, 'If all things come from water, what part do you leave for the gods?' Just so at a later period the great Ionian physiologist Hippocrates declared that all diseases were equally divine and equally human.¹

The next name after Thales in the history of Greek philosophy is Anaximander, another Milesian, born a generation later, of whose speculations a written record long survived. We do not hear that Anaximander made any discoveries in geometry,

¹ *Works*, ed. Littré, vol. ii. p. 76.

but he created geographical science, and the 'first map of the world ever attempted was drawn by him. It was a performance more remarkable for its symmetrical distribution of land and water than for its exact proportionate reproduction in outline of the surface of our globe, which indeed Anaximander did not know to be a globe at all. He conceived it as a cylinder with convex upper and lower surfaces, floating freely in space. No doubt the varying elevation of the pole-star suggested the superficial curvature, while the apparent passage of the heavenly bodies under the horizon from west to east proved the insulation of the body round which they travelled. The sun, moon, and planets are hoops of fire rotating round the earth, with circular orifices through which their light appears, and by whose temporary obscuration eclipses are caused. As to what Anaximander taught about the nature and position of the fixed stars, interpreters are not agreed.

How did this compact structure, this orderly frame of things arise? Out of an undifferentiated indeterminate something, was the answer of the Ionian cosmologist, as it is still the answer of some modern physicists. More enterprising than Thales, Anaximander passed beyond the flaming walls of the world, and sought for its true source in the illimitable space beyond. What could he find there? How determine the Indeterminable? He could but call it the Infinite, without bounds in extent or duration, producing and regulating all things. That which in his experience was most formless and incalculable, the whirlwind, and the cloudwrack, offered some likeness of its activity. Yet, properly speaking, it resembles none of the elements, but is the neutral principle in which their differences disappear.

Nothing but the Infinite persists. Our world, like numberless other worlds must pass out of existence again—into nonentity as would seem, for we are told that Anaximander proved the necessity of an inexhaustible source of being by pointing to the perpetual evanescence of things. Apparently Greek thought had risen to the truth that nothing can come from nothing, but had not yet grasped the complementary truth—inseparably wedded to it by Persius in one immortal line—that nothing can be reduced to nothing.¹ Anyhow the perpetual evanescence of things was to Anaximander no subject of regret, but rather a postulate of the moral law. In his own words as we have them quoted from the first philosophical treatise ever written by a Greek: 'Things must give justice and satisfaction to each other for their injustice, according to the order of time.' 'Rather poetical terms,' says the excellent Neo-Platonist, Simplicius, to whom we owe their preservation. Yes, but it was the poetry of the whole Ionian race, the poetic belief in the

¹ *Satire* iii. 84. De nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil posse reverti.

ultimate identity of natural with moral law. There is no trace of Oriental pessimism here, no slight on the desirability of existence in itself. Nor could Anaximander have meant that individual existence as such is an offence against the All-One, for then it could not have been expiated by another wrong. He meant that turn and turn about is a fair rule; that those who temporarily occupy this bank and shoal of time are, so far, keeping others off it, but will soon be pushed off themselves by the 'hungry generations' behind them, even as they have pushed others before them over the brink. In the words of Marcus Aurelius seven centuries later, 'we must die that the world may be ever young.'

In theology Anaximander seems to have developed the ironical fetishism of Thales into an equally ironical polytheism. The perishing worlds, he said, are so many gods; the Infinite alone is immortal.

The various material masses distinguished as hot or cold, wet or dry, arose from the primordial Infinite by a process which may be equally described as differentiation or segregation. In this way were formed those fiery hoops in which the heavenly bodies are carried round the earth. In the evolution of terrestrial things water, as with Thales, plays a great part. Anaximander conjectured with admirable sagacity that man had been developed not out of a primeval baby which would have succumbed to the dangers of its environment, but out of an aquatic animal protected by a prickly husk.

With less genius and originality than either of his predecessors, Anaximenes, the third and last Milesian philosopher, still marked an epoch in thought and exercised a far-reaching influence on subsequent speculation. Accepting the infinite substance of Anaximander, he identified it with the elemental Air, thus letting fall the ethical motive of his predecessor, who would have regarded such a preference as unjust. But besides being a return to ordinary experience the choice of air shows that philosophy was extending the suffrage to a new order of ideas where meteorological and astronomical points of view had hitherto reigned alone. Air, Anaximenes argued, under the form of vital breath is the unifying principle of the animal body; therefore it is the substance best fitted to hold together and constitute the universe. More than this, according to the common Greek opinion air was our soul and therefore the soul of things. The connexion between man and nature was never again lost sight of, and ended by dominating the whole of Greek moral and metaphysical philosophy.

III

The great Milesian thinkers had not placed themselves in direct or avowed opposition to the popular mythology; but their philosophy breathed a scientific spirit most fatal to all mythology even when it takes a developed theological form. And we have seen how the greatest among them joined to his scientific enthusiasm an ethical passion suggestive of a still more deadly criticism on the old supernaturalist beliefs. Greek beliefs about the gods were derived from the poems circulating under the names of Homer and Hesiod, and embodying the current morality of the age when those poems were composed, or perhaps the ideals of a still more barbarous period. Especially the traditions preserved under Hesiod's name seem to retain the impress of a very primitive culture indeed. Most critics agree in thinking that the Homeric poems were built up by successive additions and recasts extending over a considerable lapse of time, a rise in the moral standard being accepted among other changes as proof of a later date. But the change observed is purely moral and human; so far as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* go there is no corresponding religious advance. The Olympian divinities as depicted by Homer are anything but moral. Their conduct among themselves is that of a dissolute and quarrelsome aristocracy; towards man it is that of unscrupulous patrons and partisans. Loyal adherence to old friends and gratitude for sacrificial offerings are their most respectable characteristics, raising them a little above the nature-powers whence they seem to have been evolved. Nevertheless the possibility of a future moralisation of religion is already present in germ. Making the gods witnesses to an oath is the first step in the process. One who has been called in to testify to a promise feels aggrieved if it be broken. As the Third Commandment puts it, his name has been taken in vain. Thus it happened that the gods who left every other crime unpunished visited perjury with severe and speedy retribution, continued even after the offender's death.

Respect for a contract is indeed the primary form of moral obligation, and still retains a peculiar hold on uneducated minds. Every day we see how many persons will abstain from actions because they have given their word to that effect, not because the actions themselves are wrong. And for that reason primitive law-courts would be more willing to enforce contracts than to redress injuries. If, then, one person inflicted damage on another he might afterwards, in order to escape retaliation from the injured party or from his family, engage to give satisfaction, and the Court would compel him to redeem his promise. Thus

contract by procuring redress from every species of injury would gradually extend its own obligatory character to abstinence from injury in general, and the divine sanction primarily invoked on behalf of oaths would be extended with them over the whole field of moral conduct.¹

Law and justice once established would require to have their origin accounted for, and, according to the usual genealogical method of the early Greeks, would be described as children of the gods who, as parents, would be interested in their welfare, and would avenge their violation.

Once more, when the Delphic and other oracles had obtained widespread renown and authority they would be consulted not only on commercial questions and matters of policy but also on debatable points of morality. The divine responses being, as a rule, unbiassed by personal interest would naturally follow the received rules of rectitude, and would be backed by all the terrors of a supernatural sanction. It might even be dangerous to assume that the god could possibly give his support to wrong-doing. A story told by Herodotus proves that such was actually the case. There lived once at Sparta a certain Glaucus who had acquired so great a reputation for probity that, during the troublous times of the Persian conquest, a wealthy Milesian thought it advisable to deposit a large sum of money with him for safe keeping. After a considerable interval the money was claimed by this man's children; but the honesty of Glaucus was not proof against temptation. He pretended to have forgotten the whole affair, and required a delay of three months before deciding on the validity of their demand. During that interval he consulted the Delphic oracle to know whether he might appropriate the deposit by a false oath. The answer was that it would be for his immediate advantage to do so; all must die, the faithful and the perjured alike; but Horcus (Oath) had a nameless son, swift to pursue without feet, strong to grasp without hands, who would destroy the sinner's whole race. Glaucus craved forgiveness, but was informed that to tempt the god was equivalent to committing the crime. He went home and restored the deposit; but his whole family perished utterly before three generations had passed by.

To complete the fusion of morality with religion another step remained to take. Punishment must be transferred from the culprit's innocent children to the culprit himself in a future state. But the Olympian theology was, at least originally, powerless to effect this revolution, just as Iahvism was afterwards until it came into touch with the Avestic faith. Being

¹ *Iliad*, iv. 160 *sqq.*, 235 *sqq.* The Hesiod of the *Works and Days* has already reached the higher stage (*op. cit.* 253 *sqq.*). Cf. Maine's *Ancient Law*, chapter x.

personifications of celestial phenomena the Olympians had nothing to do with the dark underworld whither men descended after death. There existed, however, side by side with the brilliant religion of court and camp, made so familiar to us by Greek epic poetry, another religion practised by simple country folk to whom war meant ruin, courts of justice a trick invented by kings for exacting bribes, sea-voyages a senseless imprudence, chariot-racing a sinful waste of money, and beautiful women drones in the human hive or demons of extravagance, invented by Zeus for the purpose of venting his spite against the human race. What interest could these poor people have in the resplendent guardians of their hereditary oppressors, in Hêrê and Athênê, in Apollo and Poseidôn, in Artemis and Aphroditê? But they had other gods peculiar to themselves whose worship was wrapt in mystery, partly that its objects need not be lured away by the attractions of richer offerings elsewhere, partly because the activity of these Chthonian or Subterranean deities, as they were called, naturally associated itself with darkness and secrecy. Presiding over birth and death, over seedtime, harvest, and vintage, they personified the frost-bound sleep of vegetation in winter and its return from the dark underworld in spring. Out of their worship grew stories telling how Persephonê, the fair daughter of Demêtêr, or Mother Earth, was carried away by Pluto to reign over the shades below, but after long searching was found and restored to her mother for eight months in every year; and how Dionysus the wine-god was twice born, first from the earth burnt up and fainting under the intolerable fire of a summer sky, respectively personified as Semelê and her divine lover Zeus; then from the protecting mist wrapt round him by his heavenly father whose lower parts it formed. Dionysus, too, had his alternatives of depression and triumph, death and resurrection, whence the Attic drama grew. Another country-god was Hermês,¹ who seems to have been associated with planting and possession as well as with the demarcation and exchange of property, and who was also a conductor of souls to Hades. Finally there were the Erinyes, children of night and dwellers in subterranean darkness; they could breed pestilence and discord, but could also avert them; they could blast the soil's produce or increase its luxuriance and fertility; when blood was spilt on the ground they made it blossom up again in a harvest of retributive hatred; they pursued the guilty during life, and did not relax their grasp after death; all law, whether physical or moral, was under their protection; the same Erinyes, who in the *Odyssey* avenge on Oedipus the suicide of his mother, in the *Iliad* will not allow the miraculous speaking of a horse to continue; and we shall presently see

¹ Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. v. p. 11.

how a Greek philosopher placed even the sun under their control.¹ Demêtêr and Persephonê, too, seem to have been law-giving goddesses, as their great festival, celebrated by women alone, was called the Thesmophoria; while eternal happiness was promised to those who had been initiated into their mysteries at Eleusis. So also moral maxims were graven on the marble busts of Hermês, another Chthonian god, placed in great numbers along the thoroughfares of Athens. And we can understand why the mutilation of these Hermae could rouse such rage and terror in the Athenian democracy, associated, as that outrage was said to be, with a profanation of the Eleusinian mysteries; for any attack on the Chthonian deities in question would seem to prefigure an attack on the settled order of things, the democratic government which they both symbolised and protected. Conversely the so-called tyrants of the sixth century B.C., men like Peisistratus and Periander try to break down the power of the aristocracy by favouring the worship of the popular god, Dionysus.²

Here, then, we find, principally among the rural population, a religion intimately associated with morality, and including the doctrine of retribution after death. But this simple faith, though well adapted to the simple wants of its original votaries, could not be raised to its highest power without being brought into vivifying contact with that other Olympian religion, more peculiarly cultivated by the ruling aristocracy. The poor may be more moral than the rich, and the country than the town; but it is from the cities and from the higher classes—including as they do a larger percentage of educated, open-minded individuals—that the prevailing impulses to moral progress ever proceed. If the narrowness and hardness of primitive Greek social arrangements were overcome; if justice was disengaged from the ties of blood-relationship and tempered with consideration for inevitable error; if deadly feuds were terminated by a habitual appeal to arbitration; if the worship of one supreme ideal was substituted for blind sympathy with the ebb and flow of life on earth; if the numerical strength of states was increased by giving shelter to fugitives; if a Hellenic nation was created and held together by a common literature and a common civilisation, by oracles accessible to all, and by periodical games in which every free-born Hellene could take part; and if, lastly, a brighter abode than the slumberous garden of

¹ Cp. Wordsworth—

‘Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.’

Ode to Duty.

² Max Duncker, *Gesch. d. Alterthums*, vi. p. 58; Curtius, *Gr. Gesch.* i. p. 338; Herod. v. 67.

Persephonê, an abode blown round by ocean-breezes and glowing with golden flowers, was assigned after death to the godlike heroes who had come forth from a thrice-repeated ordeal with souls unstained by sin ;—all this was due to the military rather than to the industrial classes, to the spirit that breathes through Homer rather than to the tamer inspirations of Hesiod's muse. But if justice was raised to an Olympian throne, if righteous providence no less than resistless power became an inalienable attribute of Zeus ; if Greek lyric poetry from Archilochus to Simonides and Pindar is one long hymn of prayer and praise ever turned upward in adoring love to the divine, the source of this great movement only becomes intelligible when we interpret it as emanating from the mythology in which Themis was a synonym for earth and Prometheus, the friend of humanity was her son. Still more important was the influence of the new faith—really a very old faith—in suggesting a more than Promethean exaltation of man in the world to come. The seeds of immortal hope were first planted in the fructifying bosom of Demêtêr, and life, a forsaken Ariadnê took refuge in the mystical embraces of Dionysus from the memory of a promise that had allured her to betray. Thus we may conjecture that between hall and farm, between the Olympian and the Chthonian religion, a continual reaction was going on during which ethical ideas were as continually expanding and extricating themselves from the superstitious elements associated with their earliest theological expression.

To make man's ultimate survival a true religious belief it is not enough to teach that the gods are just and that they must reward every one according to his deeds, or even according to his purposes. Sharing man's fidelity they must also, at least to a certain extent, share his fate. They must die and rise again as an assurance that for man also death is the gateway to everlasting life. We have seen how Anaximander pushed this inclusion of divine beings under the common lot of all individual existence to the extent of denying that even the starry spheres, which he called gods, would endure for ever, holding such a privilege to be incompatible with ultimate justice. The religious reformers did not go so far, but they went to the length of identifying the new god Dionysus with the supreme Olympian Zeus, father and ruler of the world.¹ Such was the central doctrine of a religious society known as the Orphists from the name of their reputed prophet, Orpheus. A forged revelation ascribed to this mythical personage told how heaven and earth were created by Dionysus under the name of Phanes ; how this Phanes was swallowed by Zeus to whom he communicated his wonder-

¹ Ed. Meyer, *Gesch. d. Alterthums*, vol. ii. p. 739.

working power ; how a second Dionysus called Zagreus sprang from the union of Zeus with Demêtêr ; how when Zagreus was torn to pieces by the envious Titans his heart was saved and formed into a third Dionysus, the son of Zeus and Semelê, the god of wine and Bacchic orgies, while the Titans, consumed by the vengeful lightnings of Zeus were reduced to ashes, which on being dispersed over the world by winds became a seed of immortal life to the animals and men that inhaled them. According to this religion the soul does not perish at death but enters a new body where she expiates by appropriate sufferings the sins committed in her former incarnation. But Zeus has given power to Demêtêr and Persephonê to deliver the tormented ones from the cycle of metempsychôsis, the ever-renewed concatenation of guilt and misery. And for those who have been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries there is a hope of deliverance held out. 'Happy is the man,' sings Pindar, 'who has seen them before descending into the hollows of earth. He knows the end of life ; he knows its god-given beginning.'¹ And Aeschylus, with more unrestricted spirituality, declares that there is another Zeus in the world below who pronounces a final judgment on transgressions committed here.²

IV

The reformed Greek religion seems to have reacted not less powerfully on philosophy than on poetry. Two thinkers, Pythagoras of Samos, and Xenophanes of Colophon, both belonging to the second half of the sixth century B.C., bear witness to its effects. Of the two Pythagoras is far the more important, his influence indeed continuing to be felt until Christianity put an end to Greek philosophy itself. About his life little authentic information has survived ; but it is certain that he emigrated from Samos and settled at Croton, a Greek city in southern Italy, where he founded a philosophical school which took an active share in politics, throwing its weight on the aristocratic side, and finally falling a victim to democratic vengeance in a sanguinary party conflict. The associations of the new religion were at first with democracy ; but Pythagoras seems to have captured some of its characteristic doctrines for those who called themselves the Best, and whom he really tried to make the best—or at least the fittest to hold power—by a moral and intellectual discipline such as Hellas had never seen before. In this connexion it is interesting to note that the patron deity of the Pythagorean order was not Dionysus but the Olympian Apollo—a god not of passion but of self-restraint.

¹ *Frag.* 102.

² *Supplices*, 230 sqq. (Clarendon Press Ed., 1902).

Pythagoras certainly taught the doctrine of a future life under the form of metempsychôsis; and there is a touching story told by Xenophanes that he once interceded for a beaten dog on the plea that he recognised in her howls the voice of a dear friend whom he had lost. Herodotus charges him with having borrowed the doctrine without acknowledgment from Egypt; but modern researches prove beyond a doubt that this was a mistake; seeing that metempsychôsis was unknown to the religion of Osiris.

Besides religion and practical life, philosophy, as we saw, has a third source, which is science. But to what this amounted in the case of early Pythagoreanism is less easy to determine. Tradition credits the master himself with important discoveries in arithmetic, geometry, and acoustics, among which Euclid's forty-seventh proposition—still known as the Pythagorean theorem—is counted—whether truly or not, the historians of mathematics must decide. The Pythagoreans of a later age are known to have taught that all things are made out of numbers, just as the early Ionians taught that water or some other material element was the primordial substance. They did not mean by this that the laws of nature are capable of exact numerical expression, but just crudely that the objects of sight and touch together with the objects of abstract thought *are* numbers, like one, two, three, and their combinations—possibly a no more unthinkable proposition than to say that they are electric strains. Intelligible or not, such a notion seems too abstract for sixth century speculation. What Pythagoras himself taught—and did not teach—about the nature of things may perhaps be inferred by combining certain statements of his younger contemporary Heracleitus of Ephesus with a later tradition about the metaphysics of the school. Heracleitus observes that 'the learning of many things teacheth not understanding else it could have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus. . . . Pythagoras practised enquiry beyond all other men, and . . . claimed for his own wisdom what was but knowledge of many things, and an art of mischief.'¹ Now if Pythagoras had really said that all things are made of numbers, Heracleitus would hardly have failed to recognise this as at least an original idea, whereas he treats him as a mere compiler, as one whose philosophy lacks centrality. But besides his want of originality, Pythagoras is positively mischievous. Only in speaking about Homer and Hesiod does Heracleitus use similarly violent language. The great epic poet is to be flogged out of the public contests for his denunciation of war (43). And Hesiod is a poor ignorant creature for distinguishing between day and night—which

¹ *Fragments*, 16 and 17 (Burnet).

according to the Ephesian Seer are the same thing. It seems likely, then, that the original sin of Pythagoras was his failure to perceive the necessity of strife, and the identity of opposites. Now, according to Aristotle, the Pythagoreans drew up a table of opposites, comprising the following couples :

The Limit and the Infinite ; The Odd and the Even ; The One and the Many ; The Right and the Left ; The Male and the Female ; The Resting and the Moving ; The Straight and the Curved ; Light and Darkness ; The Good and the Bad ; The Square and the Oblong.¹

Aristotle says that either the Pythagoreans borrowed their system from Alcmaeon of Croton or he from them ; adding that Alcmaeon was in his prime when Pythagoras was an old man. There seems, then, to be no reason for not crediting the founder of the school himself with the creation of the antithetical method. It is not a good method either in literature or in philosophy, though occasionally useful as a help to memory, and always a ready resource in rhetoric ; but we have to recognise its importance for Greek thought, of which indeed it became in the fifth century B.C. a fundamental form, continuing even after that, as we shall see, to play a fundamental part in the systematisation of Aristotle. To classical scholars it has been made most familiar by the historical masterpiece of Greek classic literature. A Thucydides could no more have dispensed with this cumbrous mechanism than a rope-dancer with his balancing-pole ; and many a schoolboy has been sorely puzzled by the fantastic contortions that Italiote philosophy imposed on Athenian oratory.

V

Xenophanes of Colophon, the thinker who next claims our attention, has already been mentioned as a contemporary of Pythagoras and an authority for his teaching. But although occupying an important position in the evolution of thought, this man was by profession a minstrel and only at his odd moments a philosopher. Driven from his native country in youth he spent sixty-seven years wandering about Hellas and possibly earning money by the recital of his verses, of which some fragments still survive. At any rate, he speaks with what looks like bitter professional jealousy of the honours and emoluments heaped by an undiscerning public on boxers, wrestlers, racers, and chariot-drivers who, as he naïvely puts it, were much less deserving of such rewards than he was. Like a true Ionian, he held that mind should be preferred to muscle. He liked people to talk about themselves and their experience

¹ Arist., *Metaph.* i. 5.

of real life—doubtless as a good opening for the introduction of his own reminiscences. The past lived again before his imagination in a series of brilliant pictures. He saw the old Ionians, as yet uncorrupted by Lydian profligacy, and undegraded by domestic tyranny, walking gravely about the Agora in purple cloaks, their hair arranged in perfumed tresses. He describes such a banquet as would have delighted those ancient worthies, with the guests waiting for garlands to be put on their heads as they reclined round bowls of odorous wine—not to be drunk without an infusion of clear fresh water ; for moderation, justice, and piety should be uppermost in the thoughts of men. Perhaps at some more modern feast he would ask whether, with so high an ideal of conduct, it was right to believe things of the Olympians that would be a disgrace to mortal men. And then he might recite without offence some new verses of his own in which Homer and Hesiod were denounced for attributing theft, adultery, and mutual deceit to the gods. And then, if the company were not too sleepy, or too much engrossed in discussing the competitors at the next great games, he might go on to explain that those old poets were simply making a pantheon after the image of their own society, or rather of the old time before them ; the great mistake being to indulge in anthropomorphism of any kind, a practice only worthy of barbarians. And here our philosophic rhapsodist would not miss the opportunity for working in his own experiences as a traveller ; telling how the Aethiopians figure their gods as woolly-haired and flat-nosed, and the Thracians theirs as fair-haired and blue-eyed—just as bulls and lions, could they paint, would make gods in their own image.

There are one or two indications going to prove that the new Orphic religion, notwithstanding its great seriousness, pleased Xenophanes just as little as Homer's frivolous stories. The epigram about Pythagoras and the dog may have been penned in a spirit of satire rather than of sympathy. And we are told that when the Eleans asked him should they sacrifice to Leucothea and mourn for her or not, he bid them not sacrifice to her if they believed her to be human, and not mourn if they believed her to be divine. And in general he held it as impious to believe that the gods were ever born as that they should ever die. In truth, according to Xenophanes there is but one supreme God, who never moves, who sees and hears and thinks with his whole being, whose will is accomplished without an effort ; and this God he identifies with the vault of heaven.

Xenophanes was not a pantheist ; he did not deify the whole material universe. The exceedingly scanty information at our disposal makes it probable that he looked on the lower world as a realm of change, open to strictly scientific observation—

following in this respect the lead of the Milesian school. He derived the winds from the sea, and all other things from a mixture of water and earth. The earth he conceived as extending downwards to infinity—an idea perhaps suggested by the infinite air of Anaximenes. Like the Milesians also he was no abstract dreamer but a thoroughly scientific observer, who could quote the fossil remains found on dry land as evidence of former alluvial deposits, explaining them to be hardened impressions of animals taken on mud.

VI

Following the order of time, we now come to the greatest of Greek pre-Socratic philosophers, Heracleitus of Ephesus (about 500 B.C.). This wonderful thinker is popularly known as the weeping philosopher, because, according to a very silly tradition, he never went abroad without shedding tears over the follies of mankind. No such mawkish sentimentality, but bitter scorn and indignation, marked the attitude of Heracleitus towards his fellows. A self-taught sage, he had no respect for the accredited instructors of Hellas. 'Much learning,' he says, 'does not teach reason, else it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus.' Homer, he declares, ought to be flogged out of the public contests, and Archilochus likewise. When the highest reputations met with so little mercy, it will readily be imagined what contempt he poured on the vulgar herd. The feelings of a high-born aristocrat combine with those of a lofty genius to point and wing his words. 'The many are bad and few are the good. The best choose one thing instead of all, a perpetual well-spring of fame, while the many glut their appetites like beasts. One man is equal to ten thousand if he be the best.' This contempt was still further intensified by the very excusable incapacity of the public to understand profound thought conveyed in a style proverbial for its obscurity. 'Men cannot comprehend the eternal law; when I have explained the order of nature they are no wiser than before.' What, then, was this eternal law, a knowledge of which Heracleitus found so difficult to popularise? Let us look back for a moment at the earlier Ionian systems. They had taught that the universe arose either by differentiation or by condensation and expansion from a single primordial substance, into which, as Anaximander, at least, held, everything at last returned. Now, Heracleitus taught that this transformation is a universal, never-ending, never-resting process; that all things are moving; that nature is like a stream in which no man can bathe twice; that rest and stability are the law, not of life, but of death. Again, the Pythagorean school,

as we have seen, divided all things into a series of sharply distinguished antithetical pairs. Heracleitus either directly identified the terms of every opposition, or regarded them as necessarily combined, or as continually passing into one another. Perhaps we shall express his meaning most thoroughly by saying that he would have looked on all three propositions as equivalent statements of a single fact. In accordance with this principle he calls war the father and king and lord of all, and denounces Homer's prayer for the abolition of strife as an unconscious blasphemy against the universe itself. Yet, even his powerful intellect could not grasp the conception of a shifting relativity as the law and life of things without embodying it in a particular material substratum. Following the Ionian tradition, he sought for a world-element, and found it in that cosmic fire which envelops the terrestrial atmosphere, and of which the heavenly luminaries were supposed to be formed. 'Fire,' says the Ephesian philosopher, no doubt adapting his language to the comprehension of a great commercial community, 'is the general medium of exchange, as gold is given for everything, and everything for gold.' 'The world was not created by any god or any man, but always was, and is, and shall be, an ever-living fire, periodically kindled and quenched.' By cooling and condensation, water is formed from fire, and earth from water; then, by a converse process called the way up as the other was the way down, earth again passes into water and water into fire. At the end of certain stated periods the whole world is to be reconverted into fire, but only to enter on a new cycle in the series of its endless revolutions—a conception, so far, remarkably confirmed by modern science. The whole theory, including a future world-conflagration, was afterwards adopted by the Stoics, and probably exercised a considerable influence on the eschatology of the early Christian Church. But Heracleitus as a philosopher had forestalled the dazzling consummation to which as a prophet he might look forward in wonder and hope. For his elemental fire is only a picturesque presentation indispensable to him, but not to us, of the sovereign law wherein all things live and move and have their being. To have introduced such an idea into speculation was his distinctive and inestimable achievement, although it may have been suggested by the *εἰμαρμένη* or destiny of the theological poets, a term occasionally employed in his writings. It had a moral as well as a physical meaning, or rather it hovers ambiguously between the two. 'The sun shall not transgress his measures, or the Erinyes who help justice will find him out.' It is the source of human laws, the common reason which binds men together, therefore they should hold by it even more firmly than by the laws of the State. It is not only all-wise

but all-good, even where it seems to be the reverse ; for our distinctions between good and evil, just and unjust, vanish in the divine harmony of nature, the concurrent energies and identifying transformations of her universal life.

It will have been observed what prominence is given by Heracleitus to the ethical moment, already so conspicuous in his predecessors. Without it, indeed, his philosophy might have become a mere anarchic individualism. But with all his lofty contempt for stupidity and incompetence he nourished the true Ionian hatred for *hybris*, that outrageous bound-breaking which is the opposite of *sôphrosynê*, a characteristic Greek virtue that will have to be discussed further on. This disease of *hybris* he would have quenched with more zeal than a conflagration. He bids the people fight for the law as they would for their city walls. But there is something stronger and more sacred than any local regulation—the common good, the supreme law whence all particular laws derive their validity, whose power, greater than that of Butler's conscience, equals its right. Identifying this law with the highest human reason he calls it the eternal *Logos*—a name of which more was to be heard hereafter.

Heracleitus was the first Greek on record who distinguished between sense and reason, giving the preference to reason. True, he preferred sight to hearing, the evidence of one's own eyes to the report of others ; but the claims of his own system led him to distrust even this. We cannot *see* the universal flux of things ; we cannot *see* the identity of contraries ; we know by reason that they obtain. And he who speaks in the name of reason does not ask to be believed on his own authority ; he must not be called arbitrary or subjective, for what he appeals to is the reason in others, uniting him to them, uniting all to the One.

In this master we find also the beginnings of psychology and of epistemology. Here also the law of relativity is invoked—with more success indeed than in physics. There is a hint that without injustice justice could not be understood ; the pleasure of health lies in its contrast with sickness ; the enjoyment of a good meal is due to hunger, the enjoyment of rest to fatigue. From two pregnant words meaning, 'I sought for myself,' we gather that he employed the introspective method in the study of mind. Apparently he found himself in the universal element of fire. 'Man is kindled and put out like a light in the night.' When he said of soul that its boundaries could not be found by travelling in any direction, doubtless this applied only to the universal fire which is the All-One. This might be called a materialistic interpretation of consciousness, only that early Greek thought, not possessing such a category as spirit, in the

sense of Plato and Aristotle, could neither deny nor affirm its reality. When we call the highest eloquence 'ignited reason' this would have been no metaphor but the simplest and most literal truth to Heracleitus. We are told that on one occasion certain strangers who had come to visit him hung back shyly when they found the sage warming himself at a stove. 'Enter boldly,' he exclaimed, 'for here also there are gods.' The sensible fire was one god, but where was the other? It was in the soul of Heracleitus himself. According to him 'the dry soul,' *i.e.* the soul in which the fiery principle most completely prevails, 'is the wisest and best'—the most completely in unison with nature.

The philosophy of Heracleitus was the ripe fruit of all that preceded it, the seed of all that came after it in Hellas, whether men were stung into passionate contradiction by his paradoxes, or induced to mediate between them and their opposites, or to fill up his formulas with a richer content, they did but confirm his doctrine of the flux, his defiant proclamation of war as the king and father of all things. He was a thinker of that class to whom nothing thoughtful can be strange. The great principles of systematic philosophy, antithesis and synthesis, variety, comprehensiveness, and centrality, constitute the very substance of his doctrine. But its strength—to speak like himself—was also its weakness. It was too formal, too abstract, too elastic. Heracleitus paid the penalty of those who cut themselves loose from the science of their time. He contributed no new truth or method of finding truth to geography, to mathematics, or to astronomy. Indeed the affinities of his philosophy are with the biological rather than with the physical or the descriptive sciences. He constantly suggests such ideas as the synthesis of decomposition and recomposition, the consensus of the vital functions, the correspondence of organism and environment, the struggle for existence, the association of individuals for mutual defence. From this point of view we should perhaps look for his true successors in the great physiological school of Hippocrates. But this makes it all the more evident that with him the first direct line of Ionian thought had reached its extreme speculative limit. Philosophy could make no further advance until it had been fortified by contact with new wants and new experiences, with the new world of western Hellas, and with the religious revival that was sweeping over the whole Hellenic race.

VII

It has already been mentioned that Xenophanes in the course of his wanderings visited Elea. It was an Ionian colony situated in what may be called the maremma of Southern Italy,

and devoted to the worship of Demêtêr. Among his hearers was a young man named Parmenides, of goodly presence, noble birth, and high position in the State; like him a metrical rhetorician, but of more sustained declamatory power; like him a thinker, but of more penetrating originality and systematic completeness. As a philosopher, indeed, Parmenides can only be compared to his own elder contemporary Heracleitus; and he had, what Heracleitus had not, a familiarity with the best science of his age such as could only be acquired in the Italiote schools. Undistracted by the infinite curiosity of the Ionian Greeks, Parmenides concentrated his attention on the new astronomy including, we may suppose, as much geometry as was available for its study. He is said to have first discovered the sphericity of the earth, and to have first divided its surface into zones. The new views of geography, whoever may have been their author, proved no less suggestive to Parmenides than the heliocentric astronomy became long afterwards to another son of the same soil, Giordano Bruno, and were fraught with no less momentous speculative consequences. But the suggestiveness was of a precisely opposite character. Bruno found in the Copernican astronomy a revelation of infinity. It broke down the prison walls of the universe, gave back immensity to space, and made room for innumerable worlds. The great discovery of Greek geography had a reverse effect. The doctrine of the earth's sphericity at once put an end to the doctrine of its downward extension to infinity as held by Xenophanes. Then the same discredit inevitably attached itself to other infinities, and all the more so because of the habitual Greek preference for limitation, now free to express itself more strongly in the absence of Asiatic influences. The Pythagoreans had shared that preference, had even been the first to formulate it in abstract terms. But they had placed an evil principle by the side of the good principle, and made it a joint factor in the scheme of things. To Parmenides such rivalry seemed intolerable. With the discovery of the earth's true shape one great antithesis had already disappeared. Xenophanes, with his imperfect astronomy, might oppose heaven and earth, regarding the higher region alone as luminous, animated and divine. But now that heaven and earth were shown to be concentric spheres, the distinction vanished and they coalesced into one, the perfect whole beyond which there is nothing else. And with the disappearance of this fundamental division every other division collapsed, Finite and Infinite leading the way. The Pythagorean theorem with its corollary that the side of a square is incommensurable with its diagonal had opened puzzling questions about the infinite divisibility of space; but in the light of the new philosophy

they seemed futile. Space is not divisible to infinity, for the excellent reason that it is not divisible at all—has, indeed, no existence as a void, but only as extended being. Moreover according to Parmenides, the distinctions associated with colour, resistance, and movement are illusory. Earth in his theory acquires the transparency and homogeneity of heaven; heaven, the immobility of earth. Both in fact are swallowed up in the intuition of absolutely continuous extended existence, indifferently conceived as spiritual or as material.

If Parmenides revolted against the Pythagorean dualism with its toy-shop table of opposite principles, the rival view of Heracleitus, with its solution of all antitheses in a universal flux, offended him even more, for it seemed to involve the unthinkable absurdity that being and not-being are the same. And if the Ephesian argued that the notorious facts of variety and movement prove that, after all, such an identity must be postulated; the answer came with direct defiance: so much the worse then for variety and movement; they are logical impossibilities.

It would have been more consistent on the part of Parmenides if, anticipating Kant, he had denied the reality of time; for although the philosophy of Heracleitus includes much more, the intense consciousness of time is that by which all his paradoxes are inspired. And an analysis of the idea of space, conceived not as a void but as a plenum similarly makes the position of Parmenides intelligible. For it is inconceivable that the parts of space should be created or destroyed or moved about. They form a united, continuous, homogeneous object, of which he finely says:

‘Therefore the whole extends continuously,
Being by Being set; immovable,
Subject to the constraint of mighty laws;
Both increate and indestructible,
Since birth and death have wandered far away
By true conviction into exile driven;
The same, in self-same place, and by itself
Abiding, doth abide most firmly fixed,
And bounded round by strong Necessity.
Wherefore a holy law forbids that Being
Should be without a bound, else want were there,
And want of that would be a want of all.’

But while the world of Parmenides can best be made intelligible as modelled, first of all, on the notion of pure space, it must be thought of as having other attributes which are not purely spatial, and one which is not material. To understand this we must study the historical antecedents of Eleaticism. Referring to the antitheses of rare and dense, bright and dark, light and heavy, by which the regions of heaven and earth had

been formerly distinguished, Parmenides admits that they contain an element of truth. But the truth is all on one side. The heavenly qualities alone are real, and these are the qualities that he ascribed to Being as such, to the sphere. If, like Hegel, he defecated the world to a pure transparency, he left it *transparent*; the world is luminous through its entire extent.

Light is akin to fire; and so, by a curious example of meeting extremes, Parmenides approaches and almost adopts the conclusions of his great rival Heracleitus. In truth the aether-worship of these two high spirits was a survival of the aristocratic Olympian religion in which they must have been reared, to the extent of having learned it through Homer and Hesiod at school. May we not conjecture that this Olympianism involved a secret protest in the one against the wild nature-worship of the Ephesian Artemis, and in the other, at the opposite extremity of the Hellenic world, against the Eleatic cultus of Demêter and Leucothea, goddesses associated with all that Eleatic philosophy denied?

I venture to suggest that the Olympian control did not stop here. I have said that Parmenides gave his extended spherical world, along with certain material attributes, an attribute that was not material. This was no other than thought. He declares that thought and Being are the same, referring in proof—or illustration—of their identity to a casual resemblance between the Greek words that denote them:

τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι

and elsewhere:

οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ τοῦ λόγτος ἐν ᾧ πεφασισμένον ἐστίν | εὐρήσεις τὸ νοεῖν.

—very much as we might say in English:

‘What *is* is what I *wis*—the word declares.’¹

This has been spoken of as a wonderful anticipation of modern philosophy. But the wonder would be if Parmenides had not practised a method perfectly familiar to his predecessors and immediate followers, being in fact a sort of speculative animism. We have seen how Xenophanes ascribed perception and reason to his supreme god, who was on the material side the overarching heaven, and how Heracleitus and Anaximenes chose for the ultimate principles of existence elements already identified with the source of life and consciousness in man, Heracleitus even speaking of the elemental fire as a god. In each instance we have to deal with a survival of the Olympian religion. The remarkable and truly original thing about Eleaticism is the severe simplification with which it reduces all mental

¹ I am aware that the commentators generally reject this interpretation to which nevertheless I adhere.

phenomena to thought, just as it had reduced all material phenomena to figured and luminous extension.

At this point we come up against the first introduction of dialectic into philosophy. After asserting the identity of thought and being, Parmenides uses it as an argument for the complete elimination of difference from being itself, for the thoroughgoing monism of the whole system. If thought and being are the same, what is not cannot be thought; we are shut up to affirmative propositions. But darkness, movement, variety, and infinitude involve an element of negation; to predicate them is to deny their opposites, light, rest, uniformity, and limitation. Now these are the most eminent types of reality, the constitutive notes of being. To want a bound in particular would be to want all. Therefore these attributes, the attributes of luminous and limited extension, alone exist, are alone conceivable. The Pythagorean system with its co-ordination of opposites, and the Heracleitean system with its identification of opposites are alike unintelligible nonsense. A modern reader may say the same of Eleaticism; but at any rate it suggested two great scientific principles, the conservation of mass and the conservation of energy.

In Parmenides we find the same ethical passion, the same belief in righteousness that characterised the eastern Ionians. Justice and law conduct the ardent youth on his pilgrimage to discover the reality of things. Retribution holds the keys of knowledge in her hands. A holy law forbids that Being should be without a bound. But higher still than this sense of intellectual equity rises his religious enthusiasm, an enthusiasm even more radiant than that of his poetic contemporaries, Aeschylus and Pindar, as of one who has stood face to face with the gods. The daughters of the Sun emerge from the halls of light and unveil themselves to conduct his chariot on its way. At their persuasion the barriers of light and darkness are unlocked. When he enters an unnamed goddess meets him, clasps his hand with that noble gesture made familiar to us by the reliefs of the Cerameicus, and reasons with him in a tone of rather feminine imperiousness about the truth of eternal things and the falsehoods believed by men.

The paradoxes of Parmenides were received with a storm of ridicule; but he left their advocacy to an enthusiastic young friend who defended his master's principles with an unflinching loyalty afterwards displayed in more tragic circumstances when he refused under torture to reveal the names of his associates in a political conspiracy. This was Zeno, celebrated as the author of certain puzzles relating to space and motion which have never yet been satisfactorily solved. In answer to those who detailed the absurd consequences resulting from the denial

of motion he urged that consequences equally absurd followed from the hypothesis of its reality. Racing was at that time the chief interest of western Hellas, perhaps of all Hellas. Accordingly Zeno imagined a foot-race between Achilles, the swiftest of men and a tortoise, the slowest of animals; let the tortoise, he said, have a start, and on your theory it follows that Achilles can never overtake her. Let us suppose the start to be ten feet, and let Achilles run ten times as fast as the tortoise. While he is covering that much ground she will have advanced a foot, the tenth of a foot while he is getting over that one, and so on for ever. Thus the distance between them, however much it may be reduced, can never entirely vanish, space being, as the partisans of common sense allege, divisible *ad infinitum*.

The admirers of M. Bergson may claim that he has answered Zeno; whether with or without reason is a problem happily not concerning us here. What interests us to note is the increasingly analytical tendency of Greek thought, and the questionings of sense and outward things that were driving it to the study of reason and of inward things.

To judge from the fragmentary records of that time, from the beginning of the fifth century B.C., if not earlier, a lively intellectual intercourse was going on between Samos and southern Italy. At any rate the philosophy of Parmenides was taken up, and in some respects amended by the illustrious Melissus, who as the commander of a Samian fleet had the glory of defeating the Athenians in a sea-fight at a time when Athens stood at the zenith of her power and prestige. This intrepid and sagacious islander—the only seaman who has left a name in metaphysics—agreed with Parmenides in maintaining the unity, homogeneity, and unchangeableness of being. But he put his finger at once on the weakest point of the Eleatic thesis, the assertion that being must be bounded. He seems to argue that, by general admission, being is without beginning or end, in other words, without a limit in time. Why, then, should it not also be without a limit in space? It was a mere dogmatic prejudice that made Parmenides insist on a finite universe; and when this prejudice was once removed the arguments for its infinite extension in the order of co-existence as well as in duration are irresistible. Being cannot be limited by another being, for there is no other; nor by the void, for it does not exist.

Again, Parmenides had spoken of being as rare, thereby suggesting that it was material or corporeal. Melissus argues with greater clearness that it is absolutely incorporeal, for a body can only be conceived as made up of parts. Nevertheless he continues to think of being as extended, though how he distinguished it from a pure vacuum does not appear.¹

¹ Diels, *Fragm. Ph. Gr.*, 143-149.

Heracleitus found no such illustrious disciples as Zeno or Melissus to continue his work. In truth for such an idea as the flux development meant decay. According to Aristotle, the Heracleitean flux was inconsistent with the highest law of thought, and made all predication impossible. It has been shown that the master himself recognised a fixed recurring order of change which could be affirmed if nothing else could. But the principle of change, once admitted, seemed to act like a corrosive solvent, too powerful for any vessel to contain. Disciples were soon found who pushed it to extreme consequences with the effect of abolishing all certainty whatever. In Plato's time it was impossible to argue with a Heracleitean; he could never be tied down to a definite statement. Every proposition became false as soon as it was uttered, or rather before it was out of the speaker's mouth. At last, a distinguished teacher of the school, Cratylus, declined to commit himself by using words, and disputed exclusively in dumb show. A dangerous speculative crisis had set in. At either extremity of the Hellenic world the path of scientific enquiry was barred; on the one hand by a theory eliminating non-existence from thought, and on the other hand by a theory identifying it with existence. The luminous beam of reflection had been polarised into two divergent rays, each light where the other was dark and dark where the other was light, each denying what the other asserted and asserting what the other denied. For a century physical speculation had taught that the universe was formed by the modification of a single eternal substance, whatever that substance might be. By the end of that period, all being was absorbed into becoming at Ephesus, and all becoming into being at Elea. Each view contained a portion of the truth, and one which perhaps would never have been clearly perceived if it had not been brought into exclusive prominence. But further progress was impossible until the two half-truths had been recombined. We may compare Parmenides and Heracleitus to two lofty and precipitous peaks on either side of an Alpine pass. Each commands a wide prospect, interrupted only on the side of its opposite neighbour. And the fertilising stream of European thought originates with neither of them singly, but has its source midway between.

CHAPTER II

EARLY GREEK THOUGHT—II

I

WE now enter on the last period of purely objective philosophy, an age of mediating and reconciling, but still profoundly original speculation. Its principal representatives, with whom alone we have to deal, are Empedocles, the Atomists Leucippus and Democritus, and Anaxagoras. There is considerable doubt and difficulty respecting the order in which they should be placed. Anaxagoras was unquestionably the oldest and Democritus the youngest of the four, the difference between their ages being forty years. It is also nearly certain that the Atomists came after Empedocles. But if we take a celebrated expression of Aristotle's¹ literally (as there is no reason why it should not be taken), Anaxagoras, although born before Empedocles, published his views at a later period. Was he also anticipated by Leucippus? We cannot tell with certainty, but it seems likely from a comparison of their doctrines that he was; and in all cases the man who naturalised philosophy in Athens, and who by his theory of a creative reason furnishes a transition to the age of subjective speculation, will be most conveniently placed at the close of the pre-Socratic period.

A splendid tribute has been paid to the fame of Empedocles by Lucretius, the greatest didactic poet of all time, and by a great didactic poet of the last century, Matthew Arnold. But the still more rapturous panegyric pronounced by the Roman enthusiast on Epicurus makes his testimony a little suspicious, and Arnold's lofty chant must be taken rather as an expression of his own youthful opinions respecting man's place in nature, than as a faithful exposition of the Sicilian thinker's creed. Many another name from the history of philosophy might with better reason have been prefixed to that confession of resigned and scornful scepticism entitled *Empedocles on Etna*. The real bond of union was not a community of opinions but of temperaments; for with both poets thought is habitually steeped in emotion. Empedocles was the last Greek of any note who threw his philosophy into a metrical form. Neither Xenophanes

¹ Τῇ μὲν ἡλικίᾳ πρότερος ἂν, τοῖς δ' ἔργοις ὕστερος. *Metaph.* i., 3, p. 984, a, 12.

nor Parmenides had done this with so much success. No less a critic than Aristotle extols the Homeric splendour of his verses,¹ and Lucretius, in this respect an authority, speaks of them as almost divine. But, judging from the fragments still extant, their speculative content exhibits a distinct decline from the height reached by his immediate predecessors. Empedocles betrays a distrust in man's power of discovering truth, almost, although not quite, unknown to them. Too much certainty would be impious. He calls on the 'much-wooded white-armed virgin muse' to—

'Guide from the seat of Reverence my trim car,
And bring to us the creatures of a day,
What without sin we may aspire to know.'

We also miss in him their single-minded devotion to philosophy and their rigorous unity of doctrine. The sage was also a party leader at Acragas, called by Pindar the fairest of mortal cities (in which capacity, to his great credit, he victoriously upheld the popular cause), a rhetorician, an engineer, a physician, and a thaumaturgist. Half-mystic and half-rationalist, he made no attempt to reconcile the two inconsistent sides of his intellectual character. It may be compared to one of those grotesque combinations in which, according to his morphology, the heads and bodies of widely different animals were united during the beginnings of life before they had learned to fall into their proper places. He believed in metempsychosis, and professed to remember the somewhat miscellaneous series of forms through which his own personality had already run. He had been a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a fish.² Nevertheless, as we shall presently see, his theory of nature altogether excluded such a notion as the soul's separate existence. We have now to consider what that theory actually was. It will be remembered that Parmenides had affirmed the perpetuity and eternal self-identity of being, but that he had deprived this profound divination of all practical value by interpreting it in a sense which excluded diversity and change. Empedocles also declares creation and destruction to be impossible, but explains that the appearances so denominated arise from the union and separation of four everlasting substances—earth, air, fire, and water. This is the famous doctrine of the four elements, which, adopted by Plato and Aristotle, was long regarded as the last word of chemistry, and still survives in

¹ Laert. Diog. viii. 57.

² That is to say, an inhabitant of earth, air, and water. The malicious story that Empedocles committed suicide by throwing himself down the crater of Etna was probably suggested by the necessity of his becoming an inhabitant of the fourth element, fire, in order to complete the cycle of transmigrations. A more authentic story tells that he died in some country away from Sicily (Diels, p. 152).

popular phraseology. Its author may have been guided by an unconscious reflection on the character of his own philosophical method, for was not he, too, constructing a new system out of the elements supplied by his predecessors? They had successively fixed on water, air, and fire as the primordial form of existence; he added a fourth, earth, and effected a sort of reconciliation by placing them all on an equal footing. Curiously enough, the earlier monistic systems had a relative justification which his crude eclecticism lacked. All matter may exist either in a solid, a liquid, or a gaseous form; and all solid matter has reached its present condition after passing through the two other degrees of consistency. That the three modifications should be found co-existing in our own experience is a mere accident of the present régime, and to enumerate them is to substitute a description for an explanation, the usual fault of eclectic systems. Empedocles, however, besides his happy improvement on Parmenides, made a real contribution to thought when, as Aristotle puts it, he sought for a moving as well as for a material cause; in other words, when he asked not only of what elements the world is composed, but also by what forces they were brought together. He tells us of two such causes, Love and Strife, the one a combining, the other a dissociating power. If for these half-mythological names we read attractive and repulsive forces, the result will not be very different from our own current cosmologies. Unlike their modern antitypes, the Empedoclean goddesses did not reign together, but succeeded one another in alternate dominion during protracted periods of time. The victory of Love was complete when all things had been drawn into a perfect sphere, evidently the absolute Eleatic Being subjected to a Heracleitean law of vicissitude and contradiction. For Strife lays hold on the consolidated orb, and by her disintegrating action gradually reduces it to a formless chaos, till, at the close of another world-period, the work of creation begins again. Yet growth and decay are so inextricably intertwined that Empedocles failed to keep up this ideal separation, and was compelled to admit the simultaneous activity of both powers in our everyday experience, so that nature turns out to be composed of six elements instead of four, the mind which perceives it being constituted in a precisely similar manner. But Love, although on the whole victorious, can only gradually get the better of her retreating enemy, and nature, as we know it, is the result of their continued conflict. Empedocles described the process of evolution, as he conceived it, in somewhat minute detail. Two points only are of much interest to us, his alleged anticipation of the Darwinian theory and his psychology. The former, such as it was, has occasionally been attributed to Lucretius,

but the Roman poet most probably copied Epicurus, although the very brief summary of that philosopher's physical system preserved by Laertius Diogenes contains no allusion to such a topic. We know, however, that in Aristotle's time a theory identical with that of Lucretius was held by those who rejected teleological explanations of the world in general and of living organisms in particular.¹ All sorts of animals were produced by spontaneous generation; only those survived which were accidentally furnished with appliances for procuring nourishment and for propagating their kind. The notion itself originated with Empedocles, whose fanciful suppositions have already been mentioned in a different connexion. Most assuredly he did not offer it as a solution of problems which in his time had not yet been mooted, but as an illustration of the confusion which prevailed when Love had only advanced a little way in her ordering, harmonising, unifying task. Prantl, writing a few years before the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and therefore without any prejudice on the subject, observes with truth that this theory of Empedocles was deeply rooted in the mythological conceptions of the time.² Perhaps he was seeking for a rationalistic explanation of the centaurs, minotaurs, hundred-handed giants, and so forth, in whose existence he had not, like Lucretius, learned completely to disbelieve. His strange supposition was afterwards freed from its worst extravagances; but even as stated in the *De Rerum Naturâ*, it has no claim whatever to rank as a serious hypothesis. Anything more unlike the Darwinian doctrine, according to which all existing species have been evolved from less highly-organised ancestors by the gradual accumulation of minute differences, it would be difficult to conceive. Every thinker of antiquity, with one exception, believed in the immutability of natural species. They had existed unchanged from all eternity, or had sprung up by spontaneous generation from the earth's bosom in their present form. The solitary dissentient was Anaximander, who conjectured that man was descended from an aquatic animal.³

¹ *Arist. Phys.* ii. 8. In the Historical Introduction prefixed to the sixth edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species* Aristotle is quoted, by an almost unintelligible misapprehension of his meaning, as if he accepted the theory that animal organisms were originated without a purpose.

² Prantl, *Aristoteles' Physik*, p. 484.

³ Professor William Wallace, in his work on Epicureanism, has stated that, according to Epicurus, 'the very animals which are found upon the earth have been made what they are by slow processes of selection and adaptation through the experience of life;' and he proceeds to call the theory in question, 'ultra-Darwinian' (*Epicureanism*, p. 114). Lucretius—the authority quoted—says nothing about 'slow processes of adaptation,' nor yet does he say that the animals were 'made what they are' by 'selection,' but by the procreative power of the earth herself. Picking out a ready-made pair of boots from among a number which do not fit is a very different

Passing from life to mind, we find Empedocles teaching an even more pronounced monism than Parmenides, inasmuch as it is worked out in greater detail. Our souls are, according to him, made up of elements like those which constitute the external world, each of these being perceived by a corresponding portion of the same substances within ourselves—fire by fire, water by water, and so on with the rest. It is a mistake to suppose that speculation begins from a subjective stand-point, that men start with a clear consciousness of their own personality, and proceed to construct an objective universe after the same pattern. Doubtless they are too prone to personify the blind forces of nature, and Empedocles himself has just supplied us with an example of this tendency, but they err still more by reading outward experience into their own souls, by materialising the processes of consciousness, and resolving human personality into a loose confederacy of inorganic units. Even Plato, who did more than any one else towards distinguishing between mind and body, ended by laying down his psychology on the lines of an astronomical system. Meanwhile, to have separated the perception of an object from the object itself, in ever so slight a degree, was an important gain to thought. We must not omit to notice a hypothesis by which Empedocles sought to elucidate the mechanism of sensation, and which was subsequently adopted by the atomic school. He held that emanations were being continually thrown off from the surfaces of bodies, and that they penetrated into the organs of sense through fine passages or pores. This may seem a crude guess, but it is at any rate much more scientific than Aristotle's explanation. According to the latter, possibilities of feeling are converted into actualities by the presence of an object. In other words, we feel when and because we do; a safe assertion, but hardly an addition to our positive knowledge of the subject.

As a religious teacher Empedocles seems to have been a Pythagorean Orphist. Not much has survived of what he wrote on the subject. The chief doctrines inculcated are that men and indeed all animals—possibly even certain plants, the pea and bean family among the number,—are fallen divinities exiled from their original abodes in consequence of some ancient quarrel, the particulars of which are not specified; that as a

process from manufacturing the same pair by measure, or wearing it into shape. To call the Empedoclean theory ultra-Darwinian, is like calling the Epicurean theory of gravitation ultra-Newtonian. And Professor Wallace seems to admit as much, when he proceeds to say on the very same page, 'Of course in this there is no implication of the peculiarly Darwinian doctrine of descent or development of kind from kind with structure modified and complicated to meet changing circumstances.' (By the way, this is *not* a peculiarly Darwinian doctrine, for it originated with Lamarck, spontaneous variation and selection being the additions made by the English naturalists.) But what becomes then of the 'slow processes of adaptation' and the 'ultra-Darwinian theory' spoken of just before?

penalty for this violence they have been condemned to pass through a cycle of metempsychôsis, visiting each of the four elements in turn; that after a golden age of vegetarianism mankind fell to a still lower depth through indulgence in animal food which, rightly understood, means cannibalism of the worst description; that the first step to man's rehabilitation is the renunciation of such food, accompanied by a general course of purification. Empedocles had apparently performed the necessary ceremonies to his own satisfaction and the edification of his fellow-townsmen; for he boasts of walking among them as a present deity, surrounded by crowds of men and women, entreating him for words of good counsel, or words of deliverance from disease. We must remember that Acragas was an advanced outpost of Hellenism in western Sicily and, as such, peculiarly exposed to Phœnician influences. The experience of other times and places also shows how potent was the contact of Semitic with Hellenic culture in developing this sort of thaumaturgic Salvationism. Yet even amid these survivals or adaptations of old-world superstition Ionian rationalism reasserts itself at least once. Following Xenophanes, Empedocles preaches something very like a purely spiritual theism, proclaiming that God has not the form of a man, 'but is only a sacred and unutterable mind flashing through the whole world with rapid thoughts.'¹

II

It is with a feeling of relief that one turns once more from the passionate mysticism of the religious revival to the saner and soberer philosophy of the Aegean shores. The great but shadowy name of Leucippus is the first to meet us here. It has been denied by Epicurus in ancient, and by Erwin Rohde in modern times, that such a person ever existed; but the evidence of Aristotle seems to put his historicity beyond reasonable doubt. The accounts of his birthplace do not agree, but that he lived and taught at Abdêra is practically certain. One line of his writings has been preserved by a late authority. Genuine or not, it is a golden saying: 'Nothing arises by chance but all things by reason and necessity.'² The date of his birth may be conjectured as falling early in the fifth century B.C.

By general consent Leucippus was the author of the Atomic theory, of the doctrine that all bodies are composed of hard indivisible, unalterable, indestructible, invisible particles, differing in size and shape, but so constructed as to hook on to one another in more or less permanent but not unbreakable chains. The current view respecting the genesis of this theory is that it

¹ Translated by Professor Burnet.

² Diels, *Fragg.*, p. 350.

was constructed with the object of reconciling Parmenides with Heracleitus, the notion that reality remained eternally the same, with the notion that things were in a state of perpetual change and movement. This explanation accounts, as we saw, for the cosmology of Empedocles; and it may be admitted that when the Atomic theory had once come into existence it had among other recommendations the advantage of combining what was true in the opposing systems of Ephesus and Elea while eliminating what common sense rejected in either. But the fact that Atomism once created performed this useful function brings us no nearer to understanding how the notion of an atom came to present itself in the first instance to the scientific imagination of Leucippus. For the whole system seems to contradict both Heracleitus and Parmenides at every point no less signally than they contradict one another, while it ignores the religious and moral standpoint common to both. And the modern theory of evolution has taught us that progress does not proceed either by antithesis or by synthesis, but by almost insensible transition and suggestion. It is by this method that I propose to explain the great idea of Leucippus.

In the eighth chapter of the first book of his *Metaphysics* Aristotle has observed that among those who assign a material cause to the world some have chosen water, some air, and some fire as the first principle of all things; while not one has pronounced in favour of the remaining element, that is earth. And this strikes him as paradoxical, in the sense of being opposed to the common opinion of mankind. For most people, he says, consider that all things are earth. And this, he adds, is not merely a popular but an ancient belief: as witness Hesiod, who tells us that earth was the first body to come into existence. But from the philosophic point of view the reason why earth was not put first becomes clearer. For it is most natural to take as the most elementary substance that which consists of the smallest parts, whereas earth is the coarsest-grained element, while fire, being composed of the smallest and lightest parts best satisfies the conditions of the problem.¹

Why people should think of fire as composed of particles at all is a question that Aristotle does not seem to have asked himself, nor does he mention the Atomic theory in this connexion; yet it exactly meets his difficulty. For the Atomists evidently got the suggestion of their elementary principle neither from water nor from air nor from fire but from earth. As conceived by them the atoms were neither liquid nor gaseous but hard solid substances, so minute indeed as to be insensible, but still to the mind's eye of an essentially stony, that is to say, earthly character. Now it is a matter of daily experience that earth

¹ *Metaph.*, 988, 33^b, *sqq.*

and stone can become finely comminuted ; as also that this state, which we call dust, is the last phase in which things appear before finally passing out of sight. More particularly dust, or something like it, is the form to which earth is reduced by the disintegrating action of the other elements. That fire reduces what it consumes to dust (under the form of ashes) is sufficiently obvious ; and that water has a very similar effect is shown by the sands of the sea, while the sands of the desert would be explained by the action of wind which is air in motion.

Furthermore, the disintegration of earth is visibly followed by its reconstruction. Although on a superficial view dust may seem useless or even hurtful, on closer inspection it reveals itself as a beginning of new things. Aeschylus describes 'thirsty dust' as 'sister and neighbour to the mire'¹—an observation we can all confirm from our own experience. Mud, again, is an excellent substance to spread over the exhausted soil, which in its renewed fertility becomes a fresh source of animal and vegetable life. This great fact of the circulation of matter is an important discovery of early Greek thought, and should be carefully kept in sight by its interpreters. It was probably the dissolving power of water which made Thales think of it as the universal substance, and the same power displayed by air and fire that led Anaximenes and Heracleitus to assign a similar dignity to those elements. But there is a difficulty about making fire the source of all things to which the other elements are not obnoxious. We can see new existences springing directly out of them, but not, or at least not directly, out of fire. It is indeed a sufficiently patent form of energy ; but the Greeks had not reached the conception of energy, still less of its persistence. Thus to think of fire as being like earth, air, and water a fountain of life, they had to go round by the sun, in fact to identify that luminary with our earthly sources of heat, a conclusion impeded by certain theological difficulties which Heracleitus was apparently the first to overcome. But of the reason suggested by Aristotle for making fire the first principle of things, namely that it is composed of the finest particles, Heracleitus could not have had the faintest suspicion. For the notion of fire or anything else as composed of invisible particles, fine or coarse, first came in with Leucippus. And if the explanation here offered be true, it arose from the observation of dust as the finest form of earth, and therefore as the form best fitted to serve as a link between earth on the one side and the more immaterial elements water, air, and fire on the other. That we should still talk as Homer did² with equal propriety about a cloud of dust and an atmospheric cloud, is a suggestive circumstance. It might well suggest to a Greek

¹ *Agamemnon*, 499-500.

Iliad, xiii. 336.

of extraordinary sagacity that there is a unity of composition between the two agglomerations, and that the heavenly body like the earthly body is composed of solid particles, but particles so small that they cannot be separately seen, the notion of invisibility being contributed to the atomic theory by air as the notion of solidity is contributed by earth. To water it owes the equally important notion of a perpetual transition from a visible to an invisible phase of existence or *vice versa*, the one being suggested by the study of rain and dew, the other by the study of evaporation. The remaining element, fire, arises directly from clouds and indirectly from air under the form of lightning. And this may have contributed the notion of unceasing mobility which completes the idea of the atom as conceived by the Greeks.

It remains to consider whether the notion of a void—no less indispensable to the atomic theory than that of the atoms themselves—came to its founder, Leucippus, through Parmenides. Such a derivation seems to be excluded by the simple fact that Parmenides, while referring to the notion of empty space as absurd, clearly regards it as a prevalent delusion to disabuse men of which needed the intervention of a goddess. Leucippus had evidently read his polemic, which he meets by the retort that if empty space is *naught* (Μηδέν) then it exists as much as *ought* (Δέν).¹ Parmenides may have helped him to a clearer view of pure space; but in any case he must have been guided in the first instance by the conception of the atoms which would be meaningless unless thought of as dispersed through an absolutely immaterial recipient. Common air holding minute particles in suspension would furnish a first approximation to such a view. Air with its whole material substance condensed into similar but far more minute particles would offer the imagination a complete picture of the universe as represented by the atomic theory.

III

How far, if at all, Leucippus applied atomism to the detailed explanation of nature or to the criticism of mythology is unknown, for anything that he may have done has been irretrievably absorbed into the encyclopaedic work of his disciple and successor, Democritus. This illustrious thinker—whose profound seriousness ought to have saved him from the absurd nickname of the laughing philosopher—was born at Abdêra, as is conjectured, about 469 B.C.,² and lived to a very advanced age,

¹ Plutarch attributes this saying to Democritus only (*Adv. Col.* iv. 2); but cp. *Arist.* 985^b, 8.

² Zeller, i. p. 840 (5th ed.).

possibly ninety or even a hundred. His writings ranged over an immense variety of subjects, and their loss is the more to be regretted inasmuch as we are assured that the brilliancy of their style was not less remarkable than the encyclopaedic range of their contents. Apart from his advocacy of the atomic theory, the chief contribution of Democritus to philosophy was the distinction, afterwards revived by Locke, between the primary and secondary qualities of matter. Colour, temperature, and taste, he said, have only a *conventional*, or what we call a *subjective* existence; in reality there is nothing but the atoms and the void; and as the atoms differed from one another in their sizes, shapes and velocities, it is clear that movement and figure have, according to him, an objective existence. But between the subjective and the objective as we understand them, Democritus draws no distinction. Sensation and thought are properties of the fiery spherical atoms, not of mind as a separate substance; and they are excited by fine particles emanating from objects and passing through the pores of the organs of sense—a notion borrowed from Empedocles.

It has been shown on various occasions what a keen interest the early Greek philosophers took in questions of conduct. With Democritus that interest remains unabated, and indeed a larger selection of moral maxims than of physical principles has survived from his works. Some are evidently intended rather for the guidance of those who, like himself, devote their lives to the investigation of truth than for mankind in general. Thus he recommends those who can afford it to adopt children in preference to having a family of their own. But it is as a maxim of universal obligation that he forbids not only injustice, but the very desire to wrong another, and that he commends beneficence for its own sake in preference to benefits conferred in the hope of a return.

The atomic theory asserts in principle that matter consists ultimately of exceedingly minute discontinuous particles, and that the more evolved bodies are only distinguished from the less evolved by the increased complication of their structure; and this is essentially all that it asserts, the rest being a question of detail. Denied by all other systems of antiquity this assertion has so far been victoriously confirmed by modern science. Very much has been added to the primitive aperçus of Leucippus; but we have it on the highest recent authority that the tendency of modern scientific speculation goes to support the principle of discontinuity as such.¹ But this illuminating Greek idea met with little favour among the Greeks themselves. It was so

¹ Henri Poincaré, in a lecture on *Les Conceptions nouvelles de la matière*, contributed to *Le Matérialisme Actuel*, Paris, 1913.

from the beginning, and it remained so to the end. 'I came to Athens,' Democritus tells us, 'and no one knew me.' Like other disappointed men he boasted about himself, expatiating on his vast knowledge and his extensive travels, but without success. Plato never once mentions or even alludes to him. Aristotle knew about him—probably because he came from the same part of the world—and thoroughly appreciated his value as a physicist, but accorded less attention to his atomism than to other less important theories; nor was any room found for it in the comprehensive eclecticism of the Stoics. Epicurus with wonderful insight took up the atomic theory as a defensive weapon against theology; but he had no word of gratitude for Democritus, and he denied the very existence of Leucippus; nor was it any particular recommendation to it to be associated with his philosophy, the least scientific of antiquity. Atomism does not seem to have been taught or in any way recognised by the great investigators of the Alexandrian Museum, nor, with one exception, by any of the noble Romans who devoted themselves to Greek philosophy. It is true that the exception was Lucretius; but that incomparable poet had few if any affinities with the specific Greek genius, and was utterly ignorant of what had been done by the Greek science of his own time. After him the atomic theory ceased to exercise any influence on Western thought, and had to wait seventeen centuries for its triumphant revival during the later period of the Renaissance.

If now we ask for the reason why so admirable a theory was received with so much indifference among the most quick-witted and inquisitive of races, we shall find it, I think, in a certain fundamental incompatibility between the postulates of atomism and the general form of Greek philosophy, the mould into which Greek reflection spontaneously ran. First of all, it assumed a number of infinities—an infinite space, an infinite number of atoms, an infinite variety of atoms, an infinity of worlds, coexistent and successive, an infinitely infinite number of throws and shuffles whence those worlds emerged as the winning chances. Now the Greek genius, at least in its classic constitution, had a rooted aversion for infinity, a rooted passion for limitation; and this was a tendency that grew on it with the progress of speculation; being far more marked among the Italian and Sicilian Hellenes than among the Eastern Ionians. And as we shall see, a similar preference was afterwards imposed on the schools of Athens by the ascendancy of Western thought. Then in the next place there was something *gritty* about atomism; there was a violent unreconciled antithesis between the little impenetrable masses of matter and the absolute void where they moved and had their being, which

would render them singularly difficult of digestion to the Greek genius, enamoured of plasticity no less than of outline, pre-eminently anxious to soften down oppositions, to harmonise discords, to connect extremes by a series of subtly modulated transitions. Again the Greeks, except when they consciously made a game of logic, never willingly deserted sensuous experience for the guidance of abstract reasoning; whereas atomism avowedly treated all the sensible qualities of matter, apart from extension resistance and motion, as a subjective illusion; while even the extension and resistance of ordinary experience presented an appearance so different from what Democritus alleged to be the true constitution of reality that they seemed little better than a fraud; the sole realities of nature, the atoms and the void, being, by hypothesis, inaccessible to direct observation. Nor, as Aristotle justly objected, was there any reason why the atoms should all be imperceptibly minute; the infinite possibilities of existence seemed to require that no restriction should be placed on the variety of their size; so that some at least should be large enough to come within the ken of vision.

So much for the philosophical difficulties of atomism as understood in Greece. But to such a religious people as the Greeks the theological difficulty was even graver. All other systems had left some halo of divinity, some glorified image of human feeling or human reason in nature; atomism turned her into a soulless mechanism in which the chance collisions of inert particles had worked out a ghastly mimicry of law and love. Doubtless to some this was no unwelcome result. Finding themselves entangled in a rank growth of superstitious practices and beliefs, their surest chance of deliverance was to cut out mythology by the roots. But the highest minds were already moving in a different direction, and either turning aside to an exclusive study of human relations, or preparing for a reconstitution of religion on the basis of a new synthesis between nature and man.

IV

Historians are generally agreed in placing Anaxagoras last in order among the physical philosophers, notwithstanding his priority in point of age to more than one of them. He was born, according to the most credible accounts, 500 B.C., at Clazomenae, an Ionian city, and settled in Athens when twenty years of age. There he spent much the greater part of a long life, illustrating the type of character which Euripides—expressly

referring, as is supposed, to the Ionian sage—has described in the following choric lines :

‘Happy is he who has learned
To search out the secret of things,
Not to the citizens’ bane,
Neither for aught that brings
An unrighteous gain,
But the ageless order he sees
Of nature that cannot die,
And the causes whence it springs,
And the how and the why.
Never have thoughts like these
To a deed of dishonour been turned.’¹

The dishonour was for the citizens who, in an outbreak of insane fanaticism, drove the blameless truthseeker from his adopted home. Anaxagoras was the intimate companion of Pericles, and Pericles had made many enemies by his domestic as well as by his foreign policy. A coalition of harassed interests and offended prejudices was formed against him. A cry arose that religion and the constitution were in danger. The Athenians had too much good sense to dismiss their great democratic minister, but they permitted the illustrious statesman’s political opponents to strike at him through his friends.² Aspasia was saved only by the tears of her lover. Pheidias, the grandest, most spiritual-minded artist of all time, was arrested on a charge of impiety, and died in a prison of the city whose temples were adorned with the imperishable monuments of his religious inspiration. A decree against ‘astronomers and atheists’ was so evidently aimed at Anaxagoras that the philosopher retired to Lampsacus, where he died at the age of seventy-two, universally admired and revered. Altars dedicated to Reason and Truth were erected in his honour, and for centuries his memory continued to be celebrated by an annual feast.³ His whole existence had been devoted to science. When asked what made life worth living, he answered, ‘The contemplation of the heavens and of the universal cosmic order.’ The reply was like a title-page to his works. We can see that specialisation was beginning, that the positive sciences were separating themselves from general theories about nature, and could be cultivated independently of them. A single individual might, indeed, combine philosophy of the most comprehensive kind with a detailed enquiry into some particular order of phenomena, but he could do this without bringing the two studies into any immediate connexion with each other. Such seems to have been the case with Anaxagoras.

¹ Eurip. *Frag. Incert. Fab.*, cxxxvi. Didot, p. 850. I am indebted for this version to Madame Duclaux.

² Curtius, *Griechische Geschichte*, ii. 344-5 (3rd ed.).

³ Zeller, *Gr. Ph.*, i. p. 976 (5th ed.).

He was a professional astronomer and also the author of a modified atomic hypothesis. This, from its greater complexity, seems more likely to have been suggested by the purely quantitative conception of Leucippus than to have preceded it in the order of evolution. Democritus, and probably his teacher also, drew a very sharp distinction between what were afterwards called the primary and secondary qualities of matter. Extension and resistance alone had a real existence in nature, while the attributes corresponding to our special sensations, such as temperature, taste, and colour, were only subjectively, or, as he expressed it, conventionally true. Anaxagoras affirmed no less strongly than his younger contemporaries that the sum of being can neither be increased nor diminished, that all things arise and perish by combination and division, and that bodies are formed out of indestructible elements; like the atomists, again, he regarded these elementary substances as infinite in number and inconceivably minute; only he considered them as qualitatively distinct, and as resembling on an infinitesimal scale the highest compounds that they build up. Not only were gold, iron, and the other metals formed of homogeneous particles, but such substances as flesh, bone, and marrow were, according to him, equally simple, equally decomposable into molecules of like nature with themselves. Thus, as Aristotle well observes, he reversed the method of Empedocles, and taught that earth, air, fire, and water were really the most complex of all bodies, since they supplied nourishment to the living tissues, and therefore must contain within themselves the multitudinous variety of units by whose aggregation individualised organic substance is made up.¹ Furthermore, our philosopher held that originally this intermixture had been still more thoroughgoing, all possible qualities being simultaneously present in the smallest particles of matter. The resulting state of chaotic confusion lasted until Nous, or Reason, came and segregated the heterogeneous elements by a process of continuous differentiation leading up to the present arrangement of things. Both Plato and Aristotle have commended Anaxagoras for introducing into speculation the conception of Reason as a cosmic world-ordering power; both have censured him for making so little use of his own great thought, for attributing almost everything to secondary, material, mechanical causes; for not everywhere applying the teleological method; in fact, for not anticipating the Bridgewater Treatises and proving that the world is constructed on a plan of perfect wisdom and goodness. Less fortunate than the Athenians, we cannot purchase the work of Anaxagoras on Nature at an orchestral bookstall for the moderate price of a drachma; but

¹ Ar. *De Caelo*, iii., 3, 302, a, 28. I agree with Zeller (*op. cit.*, p. 980), as against Paul Tannery (*Science Hellène*, p. 286, *sqq.*).

we know enough about its contents to correct the somewhat petulant and superficial criticism of a school perhaps less in sympathy than we are with its author's method of research. Evidently the Clazomenian philosopher did not mean by Reason an ethical force, a power which makes for human happiness or virtue, nor yet a reflecting intelligence, a designer adapting means to ends. To all appearance the *Nous* was not a spirit in the sense that we attach, or Aristotle attached to the term. It was, according to Anaxagoras, the subtlest and purest of all things, totally unmixed with other substances, and therefore able to control and bring them into order. This is not how men speak of an immaterial inextended consciousness.

The words quoted sound like a distinct echo of the rapturous verses in which Parmenides celebrates the pure Being that he identifies with pure thought. And if it was a correct interpretation to call that Being pure extension it follows that the *Nous* of Anaxagoras must be similarly characterised. But as he did not, like Parmenides, accept a world that remains motionless and unchangeable, his extended and thinking substance (to talk like Spinoza) was bound to take on the new attribute of Power, although in the first instance of Power acting solely by mechanical methods. The primary effect was to set up a vortical movement by which homogeneous particles were sorted out from the confused mass in which they had eternally pre-existed. In this way the great cosmic masses required by earlier Ionian philosophy—the heavenly bodies, the atmosphere, the sea, and the earth—were formed. Out of these again at a later period were sifted and brought together the organic molecules of which plants and animals are made up. Anaxagoras pushes to an extreme the principle first enunciated in his time that nothing comes of nothing; for while those who speculated before him merely affirmed what we call the quantitative constancy of matter (or mass), the only change being in the state of aggregation, in his philosophy the qualities of bodies are equally permanent, equally impossible either to create or to destroy. As an account of the process through which things have passed before arriving at their present condition, the theory almost fits into Herbert Spencer's definition of evolution. It is a change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity; and with the Clazomenian also the change is through a progressive series of differentiations and integrations. But such a formula gives us only a first approximation to the uncompromising severity of the Greek idea. The primitive nebula of modern evolutionism contained only the promise and potency of our world as it is and will be hereafter. The chaos of Anaxagoras contained all that ever was or is or shall be in actuality as well; only it held all the things of experience in

a state at once of infinite comminution and of infinite confusion, everything having in it a trace of everything else. The Sphaerus of Empedocles held only the four elements together with Love and Strife in combination. Here an infinity of elements are fused at every point of the infinite All. Everything is evolved from everything else in the world-process of Heracleitus. Here at one moment of the world's history all were involved in all. The ultimate principles of Leucippus, though called atomic were still extended, and besides extension possessed the attributes of solidity movement and figure alone. The principles of Anaxagoras were actually divided to infinity, and yet though infinitely little possessed an infinity of attributes. Philosophy was not again to witness such breadth of generalisation till the time of Spinoza and Leibniz.

'All things were together,' wrote our philosopher in his grand style: 'then Reason ($\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$) came and put them in order.' We have seen that this ordering Reason was not what would now be called a spiritual principle. For to be that it should first of all be inextended. Anaxagoras had no inducement to separate the notion of intelligence from the notion of extension, for they had been identified by his great master Parmenides. As it happens, he did assume an infinity of inextended principles; but these were the very substances of which body is composed; and their infinite confusion made them the very type of what negates and is negated by reason. For the process of logical thinking essentially consists in bringing together ideally the phenomena that resemble, and in distinguishing between the phenomena that differ from, one another. Observe that the very terms are spatial, implying as they do approximation and removal. Now the completeness of the universe seemed to demand that, co-existing with the principle of absolute confusion, there should be a principle of absolute order, of absolute uniformity co-existing with infinite variety, of absolutely pure extension co-existing with the indivisibility of dimensionless points. In this way Anaxagoras may be supposed to have constructed his idea of *Nous*, in which pure reason is identified with pure extension.

The difficulty for us is to understand how pure extension, which we are accustomed to regard as wholly impotent to produce a single tremor of the movement it alone makes possible, should at any stage of thought be credited with the power of initiating and continuing the dynamical process of differentiation which constitutes an orderly world. A notion has been incidentally mentioned that may help us here. Pure extension (or space), we say, makes movement possible. Well, for a primitive thinker there would be but a step from possibility to power, from the fundamental condition of all

movement to its complete actualisation. Moreover, space not only conditions movement but differentiation as well. To separate the heterogeneous particles from one another and to arrange them in distinguishable masses characterised by special properties of their own, space must be interposed between what Anaxagoras—or his interpreters—called the Homoeomeriae, the atoms that resembled one another because they all possessed the same infinity of qualities. Now we have seen that it is just through the distinction and identification of qualities that reason acts; and as this process is primarily conditioned through the intervention of space, the close kinship of space with reason once more becomes apparent.

Plato and Aristotle are very severe on Anaxagoras for not making more of Reason as a world-ordering power when he had once got hold of so fertile a principle. He falls back, they tell us, on mechanical and material causes, to explain how things came to be constituted as they are, instead of pointing out that the world is a realm of ends where everything has been arranged by a divine purpose for the realisation of the highest good. And Aristotle in particular complains that when the mechanical causes are found insufficient Anaxagoras drags in the *Nous* to help him out of the difficulty. If the interpretation here offered be true it would seem that the charge is due to a misunderstanding. The whole world process, as the great Ionian thinker conceived it, was, like Spencer's, essentially mechanical and therefore to be explained by mechanical causes. Nor was it a crude makeshift, as Aristotle implies, to make the *Nous* intervene over and over again as the world passed through successive stages of differentiation. For each stage accomplished supplied a new platform on which the segregating action of spatial Reason could again come into play; just as in modern geology the cooling of the earth's crust leads on to the separation of land and water, and the formation of a new continent gives another opening for the forces of natural selection and adaptation to modify pre-existing forms of life.

In this connexion attention may be drawn to a remarkable passage where Anaxagoras tells us that some things contain more or less reason (or soul) mixed with their other qualities, and the larger their share the greater power has the *Nous* over them.¹ Probably plants and animals would be the most privileged in this respect, and so would offer most facilities to the segregating process.

Of course the philosophy of the Homoeomeriae contains gaps and absurdities of the most glaring description, but these are not what his critics condemn. To postulate the eternity of the organic atoms betrays a singular misconception of the most

¹ Diels, *Fragg.*, p. 318.

ordinary vital experiences ; and even granting their existence, no reason can be assigned for their combination to form living bodies under the stress of a vortical movement. But to a Greek it seemed a natural necessity needing no explanation that like things should come together ; and Aristotle's assumption that living species had existed unchanged through all eternity contradicts experience only a little less flagrantly than the similar claim made for their component parts by his predecessor at Athens.

So far as physical philosophy ever became popular in the intellectual capital of Hellas it was through the teaching not of Anaxagoras but of his disciple Diogenes, a clever superficial Dorian from Apollonia in Crete, probably a surgeon by profession. An Eclectic like Empedocles, he identified the *Nous* of his master with Air, the world element of Anaximenes. This was the theory that Aristophanes satirised when he represented his typical philosopher as being drawn up in a basket to the higher regions of the atmosphere that he might imbibe intelligence in its purest form. It was, indeed, a popular belief that the Athenians owed their quick wits to the fine clear air in which they lived, and that the stupidity of the Boeotians was connected with their foggy climate. As an anatomist Diogenes seems to have done good work based on dissections of the human subject. But his chief glory is to have created or brought into use the scientific term differentiation (*ἐτεροίωσις*). Apparently it had not been used by Anaxagoras, but it exactly describes the process by which that great thinker conceived order to have been educed from chaos. But the term did not make its fortune in philosophy until twenty-three centuries later. It never occurs in Plato and seldom in Aristotle, although the principle of the division of labour which it now so aptly expresses was well known to both, its importance as a factor in social evolution having been discovered by Plato, and as a factor in biological evolution by Aristotle.

One other disciple of Anaxagoras, Archelaus, is mentioned with the doubtful credit of having taught physical science to Socrates ; and some authorities make him of Athenian birth. His cosmology is not original ; but in ethics he is reported to have held that justice and turpitude existed by convention, not by nature—an idea of which we shall hear more by-and-bye.

V

A world where ordering reason was not only raised to supreme power, but also jealously secluded from all communion with lower forms of existence, meant to popular imagination a world from which divinity had been withdrawn. The astronomical teaching of Anaxagoras was well calculated to increase a not unfounded alarm. Underlying the local tribal mythology of Athens and of Greece generally, was an older, deeper nature-worship, chiefly directed towards those heavenly luminaries which shone so graciously on all men, and to which all men yielded, or were supposed to yield, grateful homage in return. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*. Every Athenian citizen from Nicias to Strepsiades would feel his own belief strengthened by such a universal concurrence of authority. Two generations later, Plato held fast to the same conviction, severely denouncing its impugnors, whom he would, if possible, have silenced with the heaviest penalties. To Aristotle, also, the heavenly bodies were something far more precious and perfect than anything in our sublunary sphere, something to be spoken of only in language of enthusiastic and passionate love. At a far later period Marcus Aurelius could refer to them as visible gods;¹ and just before the final extinction of Paganism highly-educated men still offered up their orisons in silence and secrecy to the moon.² Judge, then, with what horror an orthodox public received Anaxagoras's announcement that the moon shone only by reflected light, that she was an earthy body, and that her surface was intersected with mountains and ravines, besides being partially built over. The bright Selênê, the Queen of Heaven, the most interesting and sympathetic of goddesses, whose phases so vividly recalled the course of human life, who was firmly believed to bring fine weather at her return and to take it away at her departure, was degraded into a cold, dark, senseless clod.³ Democritus observed that all this had been known a long time in the eastern countries where he had travelled. Possibly; but fathers of families could not have been more disturbed if it had been a brand-new discovery. The sun, too, they were told, was a red-hot stone larger than Peloponnesus—a somewhat unwieldy size even for a Homeric god. Socrates, little as he cared about physical investigations generally, took this theory very seriously to heart, and attempted

¹ M. Antoninus, xii. 28.

² Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii. 2, p. 738 (3rd ed.).

³ Even regulating the calendar by the sun instead of by the moon seems to have been regarded as a dangerous and impious innovation by the more conservative Athenians—at least judging from the half-serious pleasantry of Aristophanes, *Nub.*, 608–26. (Dindorf.)

to show by a series of distinctions that sun-heat and fire-heat were essentially different from each other.¹

A duller people than the Athenians would probably have shown far less suspicion of scientific innovations. Men who were accustomed to anticipate the arguments of an orator before they were half out of his mouth, with whom the extraction of reluctant admissions by cross-examination was habitually used as a weapon of attack and defence in the public law courts and practised as a game in private circles—who were perpetually on their guard against insidious attacks from foreign and domestic foes—had minds ready trained to the work of an inquisitorial priesthood. An Athenian, moreover, had mythology at his fingers' ends; he was accustomed to see its leading incidents placed before him on the stage not only with intense realism, but with a systematic adaptation to the demands of common experience and a careful concatenation of cause and effect, which gave his belief in them all the force of a rational conviction while retaining all the charm of a supernatural creed. Then, again, the constitution of Athens, less than that of any other Greek State, could be worked without the devoted, self-denying co-operation of her citizens; and in their minds sense of duty was inseparably associated with religious belief, based in its turn on mythological traditions. A great poet has said, and said truly, that Athens was 'on the will of man as on a mount of diamond set,' but the crystallising force which gave that collective human will such clearness and keenness and tenacity was faith in the protecting presence of a diviner Will at whose withdrawal it would have crumbled into dust. Lastly, the Athenians had no genius for natural science; none of them were ever distinguished as savants. They looked on the new knowledge much as Swift looked on it two thousands years afterwards. It was, they thought, a miserable trifling waste of time, not productive of any practical good, breeding conceit in young men, and quite unworthy of receiving any attention from orators, soldiers, and statesmen. Pericles, indeed, thought differently, but Pericles was as much beyond his age when he talked about nature with Anaxagoras as when he charged Aspasia with the government of his household and the entertainment of his guests.

These reflections are offered, not in excuse but in explanation of Athenian intolerance, a phenomenon for the rest unparalleled in ancient Greece. We cannot say that men were then, or ever have been, logically obliged to choose between atheism and superstition. If instead of using *Nous* as a half-contemptuous nickname for the Clazomenian stranger, his contemporaries had taken the trouble to understand what *Nous*

¹ Xenophon, *Mem.* iv. 7, 6.

really meant, they might have found in it the possibility of a deep religious significance; they might have identified it with all that was best and purest in their own guardian goddess Athênê; have recognised it as the very foundation of their own most characteristic excellences. But vast spiritual revolutions are not so easily accomplished; and when, before the lapse of many years, Nous was again presented to the Athenian people, this time actually personified as an Athenian citizen, it was again misunderstood, again rejected, and became the occasion for a display of the same persecuting spirit, unhappily pushed to a more fatal extreme.

Under such unfavourable auspices did philosophy find a home in Athens. The great maritime capital had drawn to itself every other species of intellectual eminence, and this could not fail to follow with the rest. But philosophy, although hitherto identified with mathematical and physical science, held unexhausted possibilities of development in reserve. According to a well-known legend, Thales once fell into a tank while absorbed in gazing at the stars. An old woman advised him to look at the tank in future, for there he would see the water and the stars as well. Others after him had got into similar difficulties, and might seek to evade them by a similar artifice. While busied with the study of cosmic evolution, they had stumbled unawares on some perplexing mental problems. Why do the senses suggest beliefs so much at variance with those arrived at by abstract reasoning? Why should reason be more trustworthy than sense? Why are the foremost Hellenic thinkers so hopelessly disagreed? What is the criterion of truth? Of what use are conclusions which cannot command universal assent? Or, granting that truth is discoverable, how can it be communicated to others? Such were some of the questions now beginning urgently to press for a solution. 'I sought for myself,' said Heracleitus in his oracular style. His successors had to do even more—to seek not only for themselves but for others; to study the beliefs, habits, and aptitudes of their hearers with profound sagacity, in order to win admission for the lessons they were striving to impart. And when a systematic investigation of human nature had once begun, it could not stop short with a mere analysis of the intellectual faculties; what a man did was after all so very much more important than what he knew, was, in truth, that which alone gave his knowledge any practical value whatever. Moral distinctions, too, were beginning to grow uncertain. When every other traditional belief had been shaken to its foundations, when men were taught to doubt the evidence of their own senses, it was not to be expected that the conventional laws of conduct, at no time very exact or consistent, would continue to be

accepted on the authority of ancient usage. Thus, every kind of determining influences, internal and external, conspired to divert philosophy from the path which it had hitherto pursued, and to change it from an objective, theoretical study into an introspective, dialectic, practical discipline.

VI

And now, looking back at the whole course of early Greek thought, presenting as it does a gradual development and an organic unity which prove it to be truly a native growth, a spontaneous product of the Greek mind, let us take one step further and enquire whether before the birth of pure speculation, or parallel with but apart from its rudimentary efforts, there were not certain tendencies displayed in the other great departments of intellectual activity, fixed forms as it were in which the Hellenic genius was compelled to work, which reproduce themselves in philosophy and determine its distinguishing characteristics. Although the materials for a complete Greek ethology are no longer extant, it can be shown that such tendencies did actually exist.

It is a familiar fact, first brought to light by Lessing, and generalised by him into a law of all good literary composition, that Homer always throws his descriptions into a narrative form. We are not told what a hero wore, but how he put on his armour; when attention is drawn to a particular object we are made acquainted with its origin and past history; even the reliefs on a shield are invested with life and movement. Homer was not impelled to adopt this method either by conscious reflection or by a profound poetic instinct. At a certain stage of intellectual development, every Greek would find it far easier to arrange the data of experience in successive than in contemporaneous order; the one is fixed, the other admits of indefinite variation. Pictorial and plastic art also begin with serial presentations, and only arrive at the construction of large centralised groups much later on. We have next to observe that, while Greek reflection at first followed the order of time, it turned by preference not to present or future, but to past time. Nothing in Hellenic literature reminds us of Hebrew prophecy. To a Greek all distinct prevision was merged in the gloom of coming death or the glory of anticipated fame. Of course, at every crisis of the national fortunes much curiosity prevailed among the vulgar as to what course events would take; but it was sedulously discouraged by the noblest minds. Herodotus and Sophocles look on even divine predictions as purposely ambiguous and misleading. Pindar often dwells on

the hopeless uncertainty of life.¹ Thucydides treats all vaticination as utterly delusive. So, when a belief in the soul's separate existence first obtained acceptance among the Greeks, it interested them far less as a pledge of never-ending life and progress hereafter, than as involving a possible revelation of past history, of the wondrous adventures which each individual had passed through before assuming his present form. Hence the peculiar force of Pindar's congratulation to the partaker in the Eleusinian mysteries; after death he knows not only 'the end of life,' but also 'its god-given beginning.'² Even the present was not intelligible until it had been projected back into the past, or interpreted by the light of some ancient tale. Sappho, in her famous ode to Aphroditê, recalls the incidents of a former passion precisely similar to the unrequited love which now agitates her heart, and describes at length how the goddess then came to her relief as she is now implored to come again. Modern critics have spoken of this curious literary artifice as a sign of delicacy and reserve. We may be sure that Sappho was an utter stranger to such feelings; she ran her thoughts into a predetermined mould just as a bee builds its wax into hexagonal cells. Curtius, the German historian, has surmised with much plausibility that the entire legend of Troy owes its origin to this habit of throwing back contemporary events into a distant past. According to his view, the characters and scenes recorded by Homer, although unhistorical as they now stand, had really a place in the Achæan colonisation of Asia Minor.³ But, apart from any disguised allusions, old stories had an inexhaustible charm for the Greek imagination. Even during the stirring events of the Peloponnesian war, elderly Athenian citizens in their hours of relaxation talked of nothing but mythology.⁴ When a knowledge of reading became universally diffused, and books could be had at a moderate price, ancient legends seem to have been the favourite literature of the lower classes, just as among ourselves in Caxton's time.⁵ Still more must the same taste have prevailed a century earlier. The student who opens Pindar's epinician odes for the first time is surprised to find so little about the victorious combatants and the struggles in which they took part, so much about mythical adventures seemingly unconnected with the ostensible subject of the poem. Furthermore, we find that genealogies were the framework by which these distant recollections were held together. Most noble

¹ σύμβολον δ' οὐ πώ τις ἐπιχθονίων
πιστὸν ἀμφὶ πράξιος ἐσσομένας εὖρ' ἐν θεόθεν. — *Ol.*, xii. 8-9.

² *Frag.*, 102 (Donaldson)

³ *Griechische Geschichte*, ii. 112-3 (3rd ed.).

⁴ Aristophanes, *Vesp.*, 1176.

⁵ Eurip. *Hippol.*, 451, *sqq.*

families traced their descent back to a god or to a god-like hero. The entire interval separating the historical period from the heroic age was filled up with more or less fictitious pedigrees. A man's ancestry was much the most important part of his biography. It is likely that Herodotus had just as enthusiastic an admiration as we can have for Leonidas. Yet one fancies that a historian of later date would have shown his appreciation of the Spartan king in a rather different fashion. We should have been told something about the hero's personal appearance, and perhaps some characteristic incidents from his earlier career would have been related. Not so with Herodotus. He pauses in the story of Thermopylae to give us the genealogy of Leonidas up to Heraclês; no more and no less. That was the highest compliment he could pay, and it is repeated for Pausanias, the victor of Plataea.¹ The genealogical method was capable of wide extension, and could be applied to other than human or animal relationships. Hesiod's *Theogony* is a genealogy of heaven and earth, and all that in them is. According to Aeschylus, gain is bred from gain, slaughter from slaughter, woe from woe. Insolence bears a child like unto herself, and this in turn gives birth to a still more fatal progeny.² The same poet terminates his enumeration of the flaming signals that sped the message of victory from Troy to Argos, by describing the last beacon as 'not ungrandsired by the Idaean fire.'³ Now, when the Greek genius had begun to move in any direction, it rushed forward without pausing until arrested by an impassable limit, and then turned back to retrace at leisure the whole interval separating that limit from its point of departure. Thus, the ascending lines of ancestry were followed up until they led to a common father of all; every series of outrages was traced through successive reprisals back to an initial crime; and more generally every event was affiliated to a preceding event, until the whole chain had been attached to an ultimate self-existing cause. Hence the records of origination, invention, spontaneity were long sought after with an eagerness which threw almost every other interest into the shade. 'The inventor,' sings Pindar in his address to victorious Corinth, 'the inventor has done all: whence came the graces of the dithyrambic hymn, who first set the double eagle on the temples of the gods?'⁴ The *Prometheus* of Aeschylus tells how civilisation began, and the trilogy to which it belongs was probably intended to show how the supremacy of Zeus was first established and secured. A great part of the *Agamemnon* deals with events long anterior to the opening of the drama, but connected as ultimate causes

¹ Herod., vii. 204; ix. 64.

³ *Ib.*, 311.

² *Agam.*, 750-71.

⁴ *Ol.*, xiii. 17 (Donaldson).

with the terrible catastrophe which it represents. In the *Eumenides* we see how the family, as it now exists, was first constituted by the substitution of paternal for maternal headship, and also how the worship of the Avenging Goddesses was first introduced into Athens, as well as how the Areopagite tribunal was founded. It is very probable that Sophocles's earliest work, the *Triptolemus*, represented the origin of agriculture under a dramatic form; and if the same poet's later pieces, as well as all those of Euripides, stand on quite different ground, occupied as they are with subjects of contemporaneous, or rather of eternal interest, we must regard this as a proof that the whole current of Greek thought had taken a new direction, corresponding to that simultaneously impressed on philosophy by the Sophists and Socrates. We may note further that the Aeginetan sculptures, executed soon after Salamis, though evidently intended to commemorate that victory, represent a conflict waged long before by the tutelary heroes of Aegina against an Asiatic foe. We may also see in our own British Museum how the birth of Athênê was recorded in a marble group on one pediment of the Parthenon, and the foundation of her chosen city on the other. The very temple which these majestic sculptures once adorned was a petrified memorial of antiquity, and, by the mere form of its architecture, must have carried back men's thoughts to the earliest Hellenic habitation, the simple structure in which a gabled roof was supported by cross-beams on a row of upright wooden posts.

Turning back once more from art and literature to philosophy, is it not abundantly clear that if the Greeks speculated at all, they must at first have speculated according to some such method as that which history proves them to have actually followed? They must have begun by fixing their thoughts, as Thales and his successors did, on the world's remotest past; they must have sought for a first cause of things, and conceived it, not as any spiritual power, but as a kind of natural ancestor homogeneous with the forms which issued from it, although greater and more comprehensive than they were; in short, as an elemental body—water, air, fire, or, more vaguely, as an infinite substance. Did not the steady concatenation of cause and effect resemble the unrolling of a heroic genealogy? And did not the reabsorption of every individual existence in a larger whole translate into more general terms that subordination of personal to family and civic glory which is the diapason of Pindar's music?

Nor was this all. Before philosophising, the Greeks did not think only in the order of time; they learned at a very early period to think also in the order of space, their favourite idea of a limit being made especially prominent here. Homer's

geographical notions, however erroneous, are, for his age, singularly well defined. Aeschylus has a wide knowledge of the earth's surface, and exhibits it with perhaps unnecessary readiness. Pindar delights to follow his mythological heroes about on their travels. The same tendency found still freer scope when prose literature began. Hecataeus, one of the earliest prose-writers, was great both as a genealogist and as a geographer; and in this respect also Herodotus carried out on a great scale the enquiries most habitually pursued by his countrymen. Now, it will be remembered that we have had occasion to characterise early Ionian speculation as being, to a great extent, cosmography. The element from which it deduced all things was, in fact, that which was supposed to lie outside and embrace the rest. The geographical limit was conceived as genealogical ancestor. Thus, the studies which men like Hecataeus carried on separately, were combined, or rather confused, in a single bold generalisation by Anaximenes and Heracleitus.

Yet, however much may be accounted for by these considerations, they still leave something unexplained. Why should one thinker after another so unhesitatingly assume that the order of nature as we know it has issued not merely from a different but from an exactly opposite condition, from universal confusion and chaos? Their experience was far too limited to tell them anything about those vast cosmic changes which we know by incontrovertible evidence to have already occurred, and to be again in course of preparation. We can only answer this question by bringing into view what may be called the negative moment of Greek thought. The science of contraries is one, says Aristotle,¹ and it certainly was so to his countrymen. Not only did they delight to bring together the extremes of weal and woe, of pride and abasement, of security and disaster, but whatever they most loved and clung to in reality seemed to interest their imagination most powerfully by its removal, its reversal, or its overthrow. The Athenians were peculiarly intolerant of regal government and of feminine interference in politics. In Athenian tragedy the principal actors are kings and royal ladies. The Athenian matrons occupied a position of exceptional dignity and seclusion. They are brought upon the comic stage to be covered with the coarsest ridicule, and also to interfere decisively in the conduct of public affairs. Aristophanes was profoundly religious himself, and wrote for a people whose religion, as we have seen, was pushed to the extreme of bigotry. Yet he shows as little respect for the gods as for the wives and sisters of his audience. To take a more general example still, the whole Greek tragic

¹ *Analyt. Prior.*, i. 36.

drama is based on the idea of family kinship, and that institution was made most interesting to Greek spectators by the violation of its eternal sanctities, by unnatural hatred, and still more unnatural love; or by a fatal misconception which causes the hands of innocent persons, more especially of tender women, to be armed against their nearest and dearest relatives in utter unconsciousness of the awful guilt about to be incurred. By an extension of the same psychological law to abstract speculation we are enabled to understand how an early Greek philosopher who had come to look on nature as a cosmos, an orderly whole, consisting of diverse but connected and interdependent parts, could not properly grasp such a conception until he had substituted for it one of a precisely opposite character, out of which he reconstructed it by a process of gradual evolution. And if it is asked how in the first place did he come by the idea of a cosmos, our answer must be that he found it in Greek life, in societies distinguished by a many-sided but harmonious development of concurrent functions, and by voluntary obedience to an impersonal law.

This idea of self-evolving law and order is indeed the most characteristic thing about early Ionian thought. For it shares the genetic method, the curiosity about origins, with Hebrew historiography. I am referring not only to the genetic stories of the Iahvist, but to the general plan on which the more historical narratives of the pre-exilian period are composed. In the Books of Samuel and Kings the writer's whole interest concentrates itself on such questions as: How came Saul to be elected king of Israel? How came David to replace him? Why did Solomon rather than one of his elder brothers succeed David? How was the Temple built? What caused the division of the tribes? How was the house of Jehu raised to power?¹ But in Palestine it was not intellectual curiosity that suggested this line of thought; it was the desire to exalt the power of Israel's God, and by implication the power of prayer. In Pindar and in the earlier Attic drama there is the same religious leitmotiv, but under the influence of Ionian philosophy it gradually comes to an end.

Our next task must be to consider how the idea of a cosmos, an evolving world-order, reacting on the moral consciousness of the Greek race, suggested a new criticism on the origin and validity of the current distinctions between right and wrong.

¹ Wellhausen in Bleek's *Einleitung*, 4th ed. p. 223.

CHAPTER III

NATURE AND LAW

I

IN the preceding chapters the rise and progress of physical philosophy among the ancient Greeks were traced. It was shown how a few great thinkers, borne on by an unparalleled development of intellectual activity, worked out ideas respecting the order of nature and the constitution of matter which, after more than two thousand years, still remain as fresh and fruitful as ever; and we found that, in achieving these results, Greek thought was itself determined by ascertainable laws. Whether controlling artistic imagination or penetrating to the objective truth of things, it remained always essentially homogeneous, and worked under the same forms of perspective, antithesis, and balance. It began with external nature, and with a far distant past; nor could it begin otherwise, for only so could the subjects of its later meditations be reached. Only after less sacred beliefs have been shaken can ethical dogmas be questioned. Only when discrepancies of opinion obtrude themselves on man's notice is the need of an organising logic experienced. And the mind's eye, originally focussed for distant objects alone, has to be gradually restricted in its range by the pressure of accumulated experience before it can turn from past to present, from successive to contemporaneous phenomena. I have now to undertake the not less interesting task of showing how the new culture, the new conceptions, the new power to think obtained through those earliest speculations, reacted on the life from which they sprang, transforming the moral, religious, and political creeds of Hellas, and preparing, as nothing else could prepare, the vaster revolution which has given a new dignity to existence, and substituted, in however imperfect a form, for the adoration of animalisms which lie below man, the adoration of an ideal which rises above him, but only personifies the best elements of his own nature, and therefore is possible for a perfected humanity to realise.

While most educated persons will admit that the Greeks are our masters in science and literature, in politics and art,

some even among those who are free from theological prejudices will not be prepared to grant that the principles which claim to guide our conduct are only a wider extension or a more specific application of Greek ethical teaching. Hebraism has been opposed to Hellenism as the educating power whence our love of righteousness is derived, and which alone prevents the foul orgies of a primitive nature-worship from being still celebrated in the midst of our modern civilisation. And many look on old Roman religion as embodying a sense of duty higher than any bequeathed to us by Greece. The Greeks have, indeed, suffered seriously from their own sincerity. Their literature is a perfect image of their life, reflecting every blot and every flaw, unveiled, uncoloured, undisguised. It was, most fortunately, never subjected to the revision of a jealous priesthood, bent on removing every symptom inconsistent with the hypothesis of a domination exercised by themselves through all the past. Nor yet has their history been systematically falsified to prove that they never wrongfully attacked a neighbour, and were invariably obliged to conquer in self-defence. Still, even taking the records as they stand, it is to Greek rather than to Hebrew or Roman annals that we must look for examples of true virtue ; and in Greek literature, earlier than in any other, occur precepts like those which are now held to be most distinctively characteristic of Christian ethics. Let us never forget that only by Stoical teaching was the narrow and cruel formalism of ancient Roman law elevated into the 'written reason' of the imperial jurists ; only after receiving successive infiltrations of Greek thought was the ethnic monotheism of Judaea expanded into a cosmopolitan religion. Our popular theologians are ready enough to admit that Hellenism was providentially the means of giving Christianity a world-wide diffusion ; they ignore the fact that it gave the new faith not only wings to fly, but also eyes to see and a soul to love. From very early times there was an intuition of humanity in Hellas which only needed dialectical development to become an all-sufficient law of life. Homer sympathises ardently with his own countrymen, but he never vilifies their enemies. He did not, nor did any Greek, invent impure legends to account for the origin of hostile tribes whose kinship could not be disowned ; unlike Samuel, he regards the sacrifice of prisoners with unmixed abhorrence. What would he, whose Odysseus will not allow a shout of triumph to be raised over the fallen, have said to Deborah's exultation at the murder of a suppliant fugitive ?¹ Courage was, indeed, with him the

¹ I refer to the story as it is told in the modernised prose version of the Book of Judges—due probably to a priestly hand. As it is related in the old ballad Jael strikes Sisera dead just as he is raising the as yet untasted bowl of milk to his lips.—(Wellhausen).

highest virtue, and Greek literature abounds in martial spirit-stirring tones, but it is nearly always by the necessities of self-defence that this enthusiasm is invoked; with Pindar and Simonides, with Aeschylus and Sophocles, it is resistance to an invader that we find so proudly commemorated; and the victories which make Greek history so glorious were won in fighting to repel an unjust aggression perpetrated either by the barbarians or by a tyrant state among the Greeks themselves. There was, as will be shown hereafter, an unhappy period when right was either denied, or, what comes to the same thing, identified with might; but this offensive paradox only served to waken true morality into a more vivid self-consciousness, and into the felt need of discovering for itself a stronger foundation than usage and tradition, a loftier sanction than mere worldly success could afford. The most universal principle of justice, to treat others as we should wish to be treated ourselves, seems before the Rabbi Hillel's time to have become almost a commonplace of Greek ethics;¹ difficulties left unsolved by the Book of Job were raised to a higher level by Greek philosophy; and long before St. Paul, a Plato reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.

No one will deny that the life of the Greeks was stained with foul vices, and that their theory sometimes fell to the level of their practice. No one who believes that moral truth, like all truth, has been gradually discovered, will wonder at this phenomenon. If moral conduct is a function of social life, then, like other functions, it will be subject, not only to growth, but also to disease and decay. An intense and rapid intellectual development may have for its condition a totally abnormal state of society, where certain vices, unknown to ruder ages, spring up and flourish with rank luxuriance. When men have to take women along with them on every new path of enquiry, progress will be considerably retarded, although its benefits will ultimately be shared among a greater number, and will be better insured against the danger of a violent reaction. But the work that Hellas was commissioned to perform could not wait; it had to be accomplished in a few generations, or not at all. The barbarians were forcing their way in on every side, not merely with the weight of invading armies, but with the deadlier pressure of a benumbing superstition, with the brute-worship of Egypt and the devil-worship of Phoenicia, with their delirious orgies, their mutilations, their crucifixions, and their gladiatorial

¹ 'Thou shalt not take that which is mine, and may I do to others as I would that they should do to me' (Plato, *Legg.*, 913, A. Jowett's Transl., vol. v., p. 483). Isocrates makes a king addressing his governors say: 'You should be to others what you think I should be to you' (*Nicoles*, 49). And again: 'Do not to others what it makes you angry to suffer yourselves' (*Ibid.*, 61). A similar observation is attributed to Thales, doubtless by an anachronism (Laertius Diogenes, i., 1).

contests. Already in the later dramas of Euripides and in the Rhodian school of sculpture, we see the awful shadow coming nearer, and feel the poisonous breath of Asia on our faces. Reason, the reason by which these terrors have been for ever exorcised, could only arrive at maturity under the influence of free and uninterrupted discussion carried on by men among themselves in the gymnasium, the agora, the ecclêsia, and the dicastery. The resulting and inevitable separation of the sexes bred frightful disorders, which through all changes of creed have clung like a moral pestilence to the shores of the Aegean, and have helped to complicate political problems by joining to religious hatred the fiercer animosity of physical disgust. But whatever were the corruptions of Greek sentiment, Greek philosophy had the power to purge them away. 'Follow nature' became the watchword of one school after another; and a precept which at first may have meant only that man should not fall below the brutes, was finally so interpreted as to imply an absolute control of sense by reason. No loftier standard of sexual purity has ever been inculcated than that fixed by Plato in his latest work, the *Laws*. Isocrates bids husbands set an example of conjugal fidelity to their wives. Socrates had already declared that virtue was the same for both sexes. Xenophon interests himself in the education of women. Plato would give them the same training, and everywhere associate them in the same functions with men. Equally decisive evidence of a theoretical opposition to slavery is not forthcoming, and we know that it was unfortunately sanctioned by Plato and Aristotle, in this respect no better inspired than the early Christians; nevertheless, the germ of such an opposition existed, and will hereafter be pointed out.

It has been said that the Greeks only worshipped beauty; that they cultivated morality from the aesthetic side; that virtue was with them a question, not of duty, but of taste. Some very strong texts might be quoted in support of this judgment. For example, we find Isocrates saying, in his encomium on Helen, that 'Beauty is the first of all things in majesty, and honour, and divineness. It is easy to see its power: there are many things which have no share of courage, or wisdom, or justice, which yet will be found honoured above things which have each of these, but nothing which is devoid of beauty is prized; all things are scorned which have not been given their part of that attribute; the admiration for virtue itself comes to this, that of all manifestations of life virtue is the most *beautiful*.'¹ And Aristotle distinguishes the highest courage as willingness to die for the *καλόν*. So also Plato describes philosophy as a love 'that leads

¹ I gladly avail myself of the masterly translation given by Prof. Jebb. The whole of this splendid passage will be found in his *Attic Orators*, vol. ii. pp. 78-79.

one from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. And this is that life beyond all others which man should live in the contemplation of beauty absolute.¹ Now, first of all, we must observe that, while loveliness has been worshipped by many others, none have conceived it under a form so worthy of worship as the Greeks. Beauty with them was neither little, nor fragile, nor voluptuous;² the soul's energies were not relaxed but exalted by its contemplation; there was in it an element of austere and commanding dignity. The Argive Hêrê has more divinity in her countenance than any Madonna of them all; and the Melian Aphroditê is distinguished by majesty of form not less than by purity and sweetness of expression. This beauty was the unreserved information of matter by mind, the visible rendering of absolute power, wisdom, and goodness. Therefore, what a Greek worshipped was the perpetual and ever-present energising of mind; but he forgot that beauty can only exist as a combination of spirit with sense; and, after detaching the higher element, he continued to call it by names and clothe it in attributes proper to its earthly manifestations alone. Yet such an extension of the aesthetic sentiment involved no weakening of the moral fibre. A service comprehending all idealisms in one demanded the self-effacement of a laborious preparation and the self-restraint of a gradual achievement. They who pitched the goal of their aspiration so high, knew that the paths leading up to it were rough, and steep, and long; they felt that perfect workmanship and perfect taste, being supremely precious, must be supremely difficult as well; *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ* they said, the beautiful is hard—hard to judge, hard to win, and hard to keep. He who has passed through that stern discipline need tremble at no other task; nor has duty anything to fear from the companionship of an ideal whose ultimate requirements are coincident with her own, and the abandonment of which for a joyless asceticism can only lead to the reappearance as an invading army of forces that should have been cherished as inseparable allies.

It may be urged that beauty, however difficult of attainment or severe in form, is, after all, essentially superficial; and that a morality elaborated on the same principles will be equally superficial—will, in fact, be little more than the art of keeping up appearances, of displaying fine sentiments, of avoiding those actions the consequences of which are immediately felt to be disagreeable, and, above all, of not needlessly wounding any

¹ *Symposium*, 211, C; Jowett's Transl., vol. ii.

² Contrast this with the result of Burke's analysis in his treatise on *The Sublime and Beautiful*.

one's sensibilities. Such an imitation of morality—which it would be a mistake to call hypocrisy—has no doubt been common enough among all civilised nations; but there is no reason to believe that it was in any way favoured by the circumstances of Greek life. There is even evidence of a contrary tendency, as, indeed, might be expected among a people whose most important states were saved from the corrupting influences of a court. Where the sympathetic admiration of shallow and excitable spectators is the effect chiefly sought after, the showy virtues will be preferred to the solid, and the appearance to the reality of all virtue; while brilliant and popular qualities will be allowed to atone for the most atrocious crimes. But, among the Greeks of the best period, courage and generosity rank distinctly lower than temperance and justice; their poets and moralists alike inculcate the preference of substance to show; and in no single instance, so far as we can judge, did they, as modern nations often do, for the sake of great achievements condone great wrongs. It was said of a Greek and by a Greek that he did not wish to seem but to be just.¹ We follow the judgment of the Greeks themselves in preferring Leonidas to Pausanias, Aristides to Themistocles, and Socrates to Alcibiades. And we need only compare Epameinondas with David or Pericles with Solomon as national heroes, to perceive at once how much nearer the two Greeks come to our own standard of perfection, and how futile are the charges sometimes brought against those from whose traditions we have inherited their august and stainless fame.

Moreover, we have not here to consider what was the average level of sentiment and practice among the Greeks; we have to study what alone was of importance for the races which came under their tuition, and that is the highest moral judgment to which they rose. Now, the deliberate verdict of their philosophy on the relation between beauty and virtue is contained in the following passage from Plato's *Laws* :—

‘When any one prefers beauty to virtue, what is this but the real and utter dishonour of the soul? For such a preference implies that the body is more honourable than the soul; and this is false, for there is nothing of earthly birth which is more honourable than the heavenly, and he who thinks otherwise of the soul has no idea how greatly he undervalues this wonderful possession.’²

¹ Aesch., *Sep. con. Theb.*, 592. It makes no difference which we read ἀριστος or δίκαιος.

² *Legg.*, 727, E; Jowett's Transl., v. p. 299.

II

So much for the current prejudices which seemed likely to interfere with a favourable consideration of our subject. We have next to study the conditions by which the form of Greek ethical philosophy was originally determined. Foremost among these must be placed the moral conceptions already current long before systematic reflection could begin. What they were may be partly gathered from some wise saws attributed by the Greeks themselves to their Seven Sages, but probably current at a much earlier period. The pith of these maxims, taken collectively, is to recommend the qualities attributed by our own philosophic poet to his perfect woman :—

‘The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill.’

We may say almost as briefly that they inculcate complete independence both of our own passions and of external circumstances, with a corresponding respect for the independence of others, to be shown by using persuasion instead of force. Their tone will perhaps be best understood by contrast with that collection of Hebrew proverbs which has come down to us under the name of Solomon, but which Biblical critics now attribute to a later period and to a divided authorship. While these regularly put forward material prosperity as the chief motive to good conduct, Hellenic wisdom teaches indifference to the variations of fortune. To a Greek, ‘the power that makes for righteousness,’ so far from being ‘not ourselves,’ was our own truest self, the far-seeing reason which should guard us from elation and from depression, from passion and from surprise. Instead of being offered old age as a reward, we are told to be equally prepared for a long and for a short life.

Two precepts stand out before all others, which, trivial as they may seem, are uttered from the very soul of Greek experience, ‘Be moderate,’ and, ‘Know thyself.’ Their joint observance constitutes the characteristic virtue of *Sôphrosynê*, which means all that we understand by temperance, and a great deal more besides ; so much, in fact, that very clever Greeks were hard set to define it, and very wise Greeks could pray for it as the fairest gift of the gods.¹ Let us suppose that each individual has a sphere of activity marked out for him by his own nature and his special environment ; then to discern clearly the limits of that sphere and to keep within them would be *Sôphrosynê*, while the discernment, taken alone, would be wisdom. The same self-restraint operating as a check on interference with

¹ See Plato’s *Charmides* ; and Euripides’ *Medea*, 635 (Dindorf).

other spheres would be justice ; while the expansive force by which a man fills up his entire sphere and guards it against aggressions may be called courage. Thus we are enabled to comprehend the many-sided significance of *Sôphrosynê*, to see how it could stand both for a particular virtue and for all virtuousness whatever. We need only glance at Homer's poems, and in particular at the *Iliad*—a much deeper as well as a more brilliant work than the *Odyssey*—to perceive how very early this demand for moderation combined with self-knowledge had embodied itself in Greek thought. Agamemnon violates the rights of Achilles under the influence of immoderate passion, and through ignorance of how little he can accomplish without the hero's assistance. Achilles, again, carries his vindictiveness too far, and suffers in consequence. But his self-knowledge is absolutely perfect ; conscious that he is first in the field while others are better in council, he never undertakes a task to which his powers are not fully adequate ; nor does he enter on his final work of vengeance without a clear consciousness of the speedy death which its completion will entail on himself. Hector, too, notwithstanding ominous forebodings, knows his duty and does it, but with an over-estimate of his own powers, that leads him to pursue his success too far and then, when the tide has turned, does not permit him to make a timely retreat within the walls of Troy. So with the secondary characters. Patroclus also oversteps the limits of moderation, and pays the penalty with his life. Diomed silently bears the unmerited rebuke of Agamemnon, but afterwards recalls it at a most effective moment, when rising to oppose the craven counsels of the great king. This the Greeks called observing opportunity, and opportunism was with them, as with French politicians, a form of moderation.¹ Down at the very bottom of the scale Thersites and Dolon are signal examples of men who do not know their sphere and suffer for their folly. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is a nearly perfect type of wisdom joined with self-control, erring, if I remember rightly, only once, when he insults Polyphemus before the ship is out of danger ; while his comrades perish from want of these same gifts.

III

So far, virtue was with the Greeks what it must inevitably be with all men at first, chiefly self-regarding, a refined form of prudence. Moreover, other-regarding virtues gave less scope for reflection, being originally comprehended under obedience to the law. But there were two circumstances which could not long escape their notice ; first, that fraud and violence are often,

¹ Pindar uses *καιρός* and *μέτρον* as synonymous terms.

at least apparently, profitable to those who perpetrate them, a fact bitterly remarked by Hesiod;¹ and secondly, that society cannot hold together without justice. At this point the great religious movement of the sixth century B.C. intervened to provide new sanctions for morality. It will be remembered that an attempt was made in the first chapter of this work to indicate the nature of that movement, and to explain its origin as a synthesis of the Chthonian with the Olympian faith.

This process was conceived by Aeschylus as a conflict between two generations of gods, ending with their complete reconciliation. In the *Prometheus Bound* we have the commencement of the conflict, in the *Eumenides* its close. Our sympathies are apparently at first intended to be enlisted on behalf of the older divinities, but at last are claimed exclusively by the younger. As opposed to Prometheus, Zeus is evidently in the wrong, and seeks to make up for his deficiencies by arbitrary violence. In the *Oresteia* he is the champion of justice against iniquity, and through his interpreter, Apollo, he enforces a revised moral code against the antiquated claims of the Erinyes; these latter, however, ultimately consenting to become guardians of the new social order. The Aeschylean drama shows us Greek religion at the highest level it could reach, unaided by philosophical reflection. With Sophocles a perceptible decline has already begun. One is loath to say anything that may sound like disparagement of so noble a poet. No admiration is too great for a master who has combined the two highest qualities of art—sweetness and strength—more completely than any other singer, Homer alone excepted, and who has given the primordial affections their definitive expression for all time. But one cannot help perceiving an element of superstition in his dramas, which, so far, distinguishes them unfavourably from those of his Titanic predecessor. With Sophocles, when the gods interfere, it is to punish disrespect towards themselves, not to enforce justice between man and man. Ajax perishes by his own hand because he has neglected to ask for divine assistance in battle. Laius and Jocastê come to a tragic end through disobedience to a perfectly arbitrary oracle; and as a part of the same divine purpose Oedipus encounters the most frightful calamities by no fault of his own. The gods are, moreover, exclusively objects of fear; their sole business is to enforce the fulfilment of enigmatic prophecies; they give no assistance to the pious and virtuous characters. Antigônê is allowed to perish for having performed the last duties to her brother's corpse. Neoptolemus receives no aid in that struggle between ambition on the one hand with truthfulness and pity on the other which makes his character one of the most interesting

¹ *Opp. et D.*, 271.

in all imaginative literature. When Athênê bids Odysseus exult over the degradation of Ajax, the generous Ithacan refuses to her face, and falls back on the consciousness of a common humanity uniting him in sympathy with his prostrate foe.

The rift within the lute went on widening till all its music was turned to jarring discord. With the third great Attic dramatist we arrive at a period of complete dissolution. Morality is not only separated from mythological tradition, but is openly at war with it. Religious belief, after becoming almost monotheistic, has relapsed into polytheism. With Euripides the gods do not, as with his predecessors, form a common council. They lead an independent existence, not interfering with each other, and pursuing private ends of their own—often very disreputable ones. Aphrodite inspires Phædra with an incestuous passion for her stepson. Artemis is propitiated by human sacrifices. Hêrê causes Heraclês to kill his children in a fit of delirium. Zeus and Poseidôn are charged with breaking their own laws, and setting a bad example to mortals. Apollo, once so venerated, fares the worst of all. He outrages a noble maiden, and succeeds in palming off her child on the man whom she subsequently marries. He instigates the murder of a repentant enemy who has come to seek forgiveness at his shrine. He fails to protect Orestes from the consequences of matricide, committed at his own unwise suggestion. Political animosity may have had something to do with these attacks on a god who was believed to side with the Dorian confederacy against Athens. But the patron divinity of the Attic drama does not escape. In one of the poet's latest and most splendid works, the *Bacchæ*, under the stimulus of an insane delusion, Pentheus is torn to pieces by his mother Agavê and her attendant Maenads, for having presumed to oppose the introduction of Dionysus-worship into Thebes. In fact very strong reasons have been given for believing that, in the opinion of Euripides, both Apollo and Dionysus were human beings masquerading under the garb of gods.

Euripides is not a true thinker, and for that very reason fitly typifies a period when religion had been shaken to its very foundation, but still retained a strong hold on men's minds, and might at any time reassert its ancient authority with unexpected vigour. For in the *Bacchæ* at any rate notwithstanding the questionable antecedents of the new divinity and the very suspicious nature of his influence on the female population of Thebes there is much ostentatious deference to his cult and the fate of Pentheus is represented as well-deserved. We gather, also, from the plays of Euripides that moral sentiment had shared in the decay of religious belief. He introduces characters and actions which the elder dramatists would have rejected as

unworthy of tragedy, and not only introduces them, but composes elaborate speeches in their defence. Side by side with examples of devoted heroism we find such observations as that every one loves himself best, and that those are most prosperous who attend most exclusively to their own interests. It so happens that in one instance where Euripides has chosen a subject already handled by Aeschylus, the difference of treatment shows how great a moral revolution had occurred in the interim. The conflict waged between Eteoclès and Polyneicès for their father's throne is the theme both of the *Seven against Thebes* and of the *Phoenician Women*. In both, Polyneicès bases his claim on grounds of right. It had been agreed that he and his brother should alternately hold sway over Thebes. His turn has arrived, and Eteoclès refuses to give way. Polyneicès endeavours to enforce his pretensions by bringing a foreign army against Thebes. Aeschylus makes him appear before the walls with an allegorical figure of Justice on his shield, promising to restore him to his father's seat. On hearing this, Eteoclès exclaims :—

‘Aye, if Jove’s virgin daughter Justice shared
In deed or thought of his, then it might be.
But neither when he left the darkling womb,
Nor in his childhood, nor in youth, nor when
The clustering hair first gathered round his chin,
Hath Justice turned approving eyes on him ;
Nor deem I that she comes as his ally,
Now that he wastes his native land with war,
Or Justice most unjustly were she called
If ruthless hearts could claim her fellowship.’¹

Euripides, with greater dramatic skill, brings the two brothers together in presence of their mother, Jocastê. When Polyneicès has spoken, Eteocles replies :—

‘Honour and wisdom are but empty names
That mortals use, each with a different meaning,
Agreeing in the sound, not in the sense.
Hear, mother, undisguised my whole resolve !
Were Sovereignty, chief goddess among gods,
Far off as is the rising of a star,
Or buried deep in subterranean gloom,
There I would seek and win her for mine own.

• • • • •
Come fire, come sword, yoke horses to the car,
And fill the plain with armed men, for I
Will not give up my royalty to him !
Let all my life be guiltless save in this :
I dare do any wrong for sovereign power—
The splendid guerdon of a splendid sin.’²

¹ *Sep. con. Theb.*, 662-71.

² *Phoenissae*, 503-23.

The contrast is not only direct, but designed, for Euripides had the work of his predecessor before him, and no doubt imagined that he was improving on it.

We perceive a precisely similar change of tone on comparing the two great historians who have respectively recorded the struggle of Greece against Persia, and the struggle of imperial Athens against Sparta and her allies. Though born within fifteen years of one another, Herodotus and Thucydides are virtually separated by an interval of two generations, for while the latter represents the most advanced thought of his time, the former lived among traditions inherited from the age preceding his own. Now, Herodotus is not more remarkable for the earnest piety than for the clear sense of justice which runs through his entire work. He draws no distinction between public and private morality. Whoever makes war on his neighbours without provocation, or rules without the consent of the governed, is, according to him, in the wrong, although he is well aware that such wrongs are constantly committed. Thucydides knows nothing of supernatural interference in human affairs. After relating the tragical end of Nicias, he observes, not without a sceptical tendency, that of all the Greeks then living, this unfortunate general least deserved such a fate, so far as piety and respectability of character went. If there are gods they hold their position by superior strength. That the strong should enslave the weak is a universal and necessary law of nature. The Spartans, who among themselves are most scrupulous in observing traditional obligations, in their dealings with others most openly identify gain with honour, and expediency with right. Even if the historian himself did not share these opinions, it is evident that they were widely entertained by his contemporaries; and he expressly informs us that Greek political morality had deteriorated to a frightful extent in consequence of the civil discords fomented by the conflict between Athens and Sparta; while, in Athens at least, a similar corruption of private morality had begun with the great plague of 430, its chief symptom being a mad desire to extract the utmost possible enjoyment from life, for which purpose every means was considered legitimate. On this point Thucydides is confirmed and supplemented by the evidence of another contemporary authority. According to Aristophanes, the ancient discipline had in his time become very much relaxed. The rich were idle and extravagant; the poor mutinous; young men were growing more and more insolent to their elders; religion was derided; all classes were animated by a common desire to make money and to spend it on sensual enjoyment. Only, instead of tracing back this profound demoralisation to a change in the social environment, Aristophanes attributes it

to demagogues, harassing informers and popular poets, but above all to the new culture then coming into vogue. Physical science had brought in atheism; dialectic training had destroyed the sanctity of ethical restraints. When, however, the religious and virtuous Socrates is put forward as a type of both tendencies, our confidence in the comic poet's accuracy, if not in his good faith, becomes seriously shaken; and his whole tone so vividly recalls the analogous invectives now hurled from press and pulpit against every philosophic theory, every scientific discovery, every social reform at variance with traditional beliefs or threatening the sinister interests which have gathered round iniquitous institutions, that at first we feel tempted to follow Grote in rejecting his testimony altogether. So far, however, as the actual phenomena themselves are concerned, and apart from their generating antecedents, Aristophanes does but bring into more picturesque prominence what graver observers are content to indicate, and what Plato, writing a generation later, treats as an unquestionable reality. Nor is the fact of a lowered moral tone going along with accelerated mental activity either incredible or unparalleled. Modern history knows of at least two periods remarkable for such a conjunction, the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, the former stained with every imaginable crime, the latter impure throughout, and lapsing into bloodthirsty violence at its close. Moral progress, like every other mode of motion, has its appropriate rhythm—its epochs of severe restraint followed by epochs of rebellious licence. And when, as an aggravation of the reaction from which they periodically suffer, ethical principles have become associated with a mythology whose decay, at first retarded, is finally hastened by their activity, it is still easier to understand how they may share in its discredit, and only regain their ascendancy by allying themselves with a purified form of the old religion, until they can be disentangled from the compromising support of all unverified theories whatever. We have every reason to believe that Greek life and thought did pass through such a crisis during the second half of the fifth century B.C., and we have now to deal with the speculative aspects of that crisis, so far as they are represented by the Sophists.

IV

The word Sophist in modern languages means one who purposely uses fallacious arguments. Our definition was probably derived from that given by Aristotle in his *Topics*, but does not entirely reproduce it. What we call sophistry was with him eristic, or the art of unfair disputation; and by Sophist

he means one who practises the eristic art for gain. He also defines sophistry as the appearance without the reality of wisdom. A very similar account of the Sophists and their art is given by Plato in what seems to be one of his later dialogues; and another dialogue, probably composed some time previously, shows us how eristic was actually practised by two Sophists, Euthydêmus and Dionysodôrus, who had learned the art, which is represented as a very easy accomplishment, when already old men. Their performance is not edifying; and one only wonders how any Greek could have been induced to pay for the privilege of witnessing such an exhibition. But the word Sophist, in its original signification, was an entirely honourable name. It meant a sage, a wise and learned man, like Solon, or, for that matter, like Plato and Aristotle themselves. The interval between these widely-different connotations is filled up and explained by a number of individuals as to whom our information is principally, though by no means entirely, derived from Plato. All of them were professional teachers, receiving payment for their services; all made a particular study of language, some aiming more particularly at accuracy, others at beauty of expression. While no common doctrine can be attributed to them as a class, as individuals they are connected by a series of graduated transitions, the final outcome of which will enable us to understand how, from a title of respect, their name could be turned into a byword of reproach. The Sophists, concerning whom some details have been transmitted to us, are Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, Pôlus, Thrasymachus, and the Eristics already mentioned. I have placed them, so far as their ages can be determined, in chronological order, but their logical order is somewhat different. The first two on the list were born about 480 B.C., and the second pair possibly twenty years later. But neither Protagoras nor Gorgias seems to have published his most characteristic theories until a rather advanced time of life, for they are nowhere alluded to by the Xenophontic Socrates, who, on the other hand, is well acquainted with both Prodicus and Hippias, while, conversely, Plato is most interested in the former pair. We shall also presently see that the scepticism of the elder Sophists can best be explained by reference to the more dogmatic theories of their younger contemporaries, which again easily fit on to the physical speculations of earlier thinkers.

Prodicus was born in Ceos, a little island belonging to the Athenian confederacy, and seems to have habitually resided at Athens. His health was delicate, and he wrapped up a good deal, as we learn from the ridicule of Plato, always pitiless to a valetudinarian. Judging from two allusions in Aristophanes, he taught natural science in such a manner as to conciliate

even that unsparing enemy of the new learning.¹ He also gave moral instruction grounded on the traditional ideas of his country, a pleasing specimen of which has been preserved. It is conveyed under the form of an apologue, entitled the Choice of Heraclês, and was taken down in its present form by Xenophon from the lips of Socrates, who quoted it, with full approval, for the benefit of his own disciples. Prodicus also lectured on the use of words, laying especial emphasis on the distinction of synonyms. We hear, not without sympathy, that he tried to check the indiscriminate employment of 'awful' (*δεινός*), which was even more rife at Athens than among ourselves. Finally, we are told that, like many moderns, he considered the popular divinities to be personifications of natural phenomena. Hippias, who was a native of Elis, seems to have taught on very much the same system. It would appear that he lectured principally on astronomy and physics, but did not neglect language, and is said to have invented an art of memory. His restless inquisitiveness was also exercised on ancient history, and his erudition in that subject was taxed to the utmost during a visit to Sparta, where the unlettered people still delighted in old stories, which among the more enlightened Greeks had been superseded by topics of livelier and fresher interest. At Sparta, too, he recited, with great applause, an ethical discourse under the form of advice given by Nestor to Neoptolemus after the capture of Troy. We know, on good authority, that Hippias habitually distinguished between natural and customary law, the former being, according to him, everywhere the same, while the latter varied from state to state, and in the same state at different times. Natural law he held to be alone binding and alone salutary. On this subject the following expressions, evidently intended to be characteristic, are put into his mouth by Plato:—'All of you who are here present I reckon to be kinsmen and friends and fellow-citizens, by nature and not by law; for by nature like is akin to like, whereas law is the tyrant of mankind, and often compels us to do many things which are against nature.'² Here two distinct ideas are implied, the idea that nature is a moral guide, and, further, the idea that she is opposed to convention. The habit of looking for examples and lessons to some simpler life than their own prevailed among the Greeks from a very early period, and is, indeed, very common in primitive societies. Homer's similes are a case in point; while all that we are told about the innocence and felicity of the Aethiopians and Hyperboreans seems to indicate a

¹ Οὐ γὰρ ἄλλῃ γ' ὑπακούσασιν τῶν νῦν μετεωροσοφιστῶν
πλὴν ἢ Προδίκῳ, τῷ μὲν σοφίας καὶ γνώμης οὕνεκα κ.τ.λ.—

Nub., 361-2. Cf. *Av.*, 692.

² Plato, *Protagoras*, 337, D; Jowett's Transl., vol. i., p. 152. Compare Xenoph., *Mem.* iv. 4, 14.

deep-rooted belief in the moral superiority of savage to civilised nations ; and Hesiod's fiction of the Four Ages, beginning with a golden age, arises from a kindred notion that intellectual progress is accompanied by moral corruption. Simonides of Amorgus illustrates the various types of womankind by examples from the animal world ; and Aesop's fables, dating from the first half of the sixth century, give ethical instruction under the same disguise. It has been already pointed out how Greek rural religion established a thorough-going connexion between physical and moral phenomena, and how Heracleitus followed in the same track. Now, one great result of early Greek thought was to combine all these scattered fugitive incoherent ideas under a single conception, thus enabling them to elucidate and support one another. This was the conception of nature as a universal all-creative eternal power, first superior to the gods, then altogether superseding them. When Homer called Zeus the father of gods and men ; when Pindar said that both races, the divine and the human, are sprung from one mother (Earth) ;¹ when, again, he spoke of law as an absolute king ; or when Aeschylus set destiny above Zeus himself ;² they were but foreshadowing a more despotic authority, whose dominion is even now not extinct, is perhaps being renewed under the title of Evolution. The word nature (*φύσις*) was used by most philosophers, and the thing was implied by all. They did not, indeed, commit the mistake of personifying a convenient abstraction ; but a conception which they substituted for the gods would soon inherit every attribute of divine agency. Moreover, the 'nature' of philosophy had three fundamental attributes admitting of ready application as ethical standards. She was everywhere the same ; fire burned in Greece and Persia alike. She tended towards an orderly system where every agent or element is limited to its appropriate sphere. And she proceeded on a principle of universal compensation, all gains in one direction being paid for by losses in another, and every disturbance being eventually rectified by a restoration of equilibrium. It was, indeed, by no means surprising that truths which were generalised from the experience of Greek social life should now return to confirm the orderliness of that life with the sanction of an all-pervading law.

Euripides gives us an interesting example of the style in which this ethical application of physical science could be practised. We have seen how Eteoclês expresses his determination to do and dare all for the sake of sovereign power. His mother, Jocastê, gently rebukes him as follows :—

‘ Honour Equality who binds together
Both friends and cities and confederates,

¹ *Nem.*, vi., *sub. in.*

² *Prom.*, 518.

For equity is law, law equity ;
 The lesser is the greater's enemy,
 And disadvantaged aye begins the strife.
 From her our measures, weights, and numbers come,
 Defined and ordered by Equality ;
 So do the night's blind eye and sun's bright orb
 Walk equal courses in their yearly round,
 And neither is embittered by defeat ;
 And while both light and darkness serve mankind
 Wilt thou not bear an equal in thy house ?¹

On examining the apologue of Prodicus, we find it characterised by a somewhat similar style of reasoning. There is, it is true, no reference to physical phenomena, but Virtue dwells strongly on the truth that nothing can be had for nothing, and that pleasure must either be purchased by toil or atoned for by languor, satiety, and premature decay ; besides directly stigmatising unnatural vice.² We know also that the Cynical school, as represented by Antisthenês, rejected all pleasure on the ground that it was always paid for by an equal amount of pain ; and Heraclês, the Prodicean type of a youth who follows virtue in preference to vice disguised as happiness, was also the favourite hero of the Cynics. Again, Plato alludes, in the *Philebus*, to certain thinkers, reputed to be 'great on the subject of physics,' who deny the very existence of pleasure. Critics have been at a loss to identify these persons, and rather reluctantly put up with the explanation that Antisthenês and his school are referred to. Antisthenês was a friend of Prodicus,³ and may at one time have shared in his scientific studies, thus giving occasion to the association touched on by Plato. But is it not equally possible that Prodicus left behind disciples who, like him, combined moral with physical teaching ; and, going a little further, may we not conjecture that their opposition to Hedonism was inherited from the master himself, who, like the Stoics afterwards, may have based it on an application of physical reasoning to ethics ?

Still more important was the antithesis between nature and convention, which, so far as we know, originated exclusively with Hippias. Universality and necessity were, with the Greeks, standing marks of naturalness. The customs of different countries were, on the other hand, distinguished by extreme

¹ *Phoenissae*, 536-47. There is a delicious parody of this method in the *Clouds*. A creditor asks Strepsiades, who has been taking lessons in philosophy, to pay him the interest on a loan. Strepsiades begs to know whether the sea is any fuller now than it used to be. 'No,' replies the other, 'for it would not be just' (οὐ γὰρ δίκαιον πλεῖον εἶναι). 'Then, you wretch,' rejoins his debtor, 'do you suppose that the sea is not to get any fuller although all the rivers are flowing into it, and that your money is to go on increasing?' (1290-95.)

² Xenoph., *Mem.* ii. 1, 30.

³ Xenophon, *Sympos.* iv. 62.

variety, amounting sometimes to diametrical opposition. Herodotus was fond of calling attention to such contrasts; only, he drew from them the conclusion that law, to be so arbitrary, must needs possess supreme and sacred authority. According to the more plausible interpretation of Hippias, the variety, and at least in Greek democracies, the changeability of law proved that it was neither sacred nor binding. He also looked on artificial social institutions as the sole cause of division and discord among mankind. Here we already see the dawn of a cosmopolitanism afterwards preached by Cynic and Stoic philosophers. Furthermore, to discover the natural rule of right, he compared the laws of different nations, and selected those which were held by all in common as the basis of an ethical system.¹ Now, this is precisely what was done by the Roman jurists long afterwards under the inspiration of Stoical teaching. We have it on the high authority of Sir Henry Maine that they identified the *Jus Gentium*, that is, the laws supposed to be observed by all nations alike, with the *Jus Naturale*, that is, the code by which men were governed in their primitive condition of innocence.² It was by a gradual application of this ideal standard that the numerous inequalities between different classes of persons, enforced by ancient Roman law, were removed, and that contract was substituted for status. Above all, the abolition of slavery was, if not directly caused, at any rate powerfully aided, by the belief that it was against nature. At the beginning of the fourteenth century we find Louis Hutin, King of France, assigning as a reason for the enfranchisement of his serfs, that, 'according to natural law, everybody ought to be born free,' and although Sir H. Maine holds this to have been a mistaken interpretation of the juridical axiom '*omnes homines naturâ aequales sunt*,' which means not an ideal to be attained, but a primitive condition from which we have departed³: nevertheless it very faithfully reproduces the theory of those Greek philosophers from whom the idea of a natural law was derived. That, in Aristotle's time at least, a party existed who were opposed to slavery on theoretical grounds of right is perfectly evident from the language of the *Politics*. 'Some persons,' says Aristotle, 'think that slave-holding is against nature, for that one man is a slave and another free by law, while by nature there is no difference between them, for which reason it is unjust as being the result of force.'⁴ And he proceeds to prove the contrary at length. The same doctrine of natural equality led to important political consequences, having, again according to Sir H. Maine, contributed both to the

¹ Xenophon, *Memor.*, iv., iv., 19.

² *Ancient Law*, p. 52 (7th ed.).

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴ *Pol.*, i., 2.

American Declaration of Independence and to the French Revolution.¹

There is one more aspect deserving our attention, under which the theory of nature has been presented both in ancient and modern times. A dialogue which, whether rightly or wrongly attributed to Plato, may be taken as good evidence on the subject it relates to,² exhibits Hippias in the character of a universal genius, who can not only teach every science and practise every kind of literary composition, but has also manufactured all the clothes and other articles about his person. Here we have precisely the sort of versatility which characterises uncivilised society, and which believers in a state of nature love to encourage at all times. The division of labour, while it carries us ever farther from barbarism, makes us more dependent on each other. An Odysseus is master of many arts, a Themistocles of two, a Demosthenes of only one. A Norwegian peasant can do more for himself than an English countryman, and therefore makes a better colonist. If we must return to nature, our first step should be to learn a number of trades, and so be better able to shift for ourselves. Such was the ideal of Hippias, and it was also the ideal of the eighteenth century. Its literature begins with *Robinson Crusoe*, the story of a man who is accidentally compelled to provide himself, during many years, with all the necessities of life. Its educational manuals are, in France, Rousseau's *Emile*; in England, Day's *Sandford and Merton*, both teaching that the young should be thrown as much as possible on their own resources. One of its types is Diderot, who learns handicrafts that he may describe them in the *Encyclopédie*. Its two great spokesmen are Voltaire³ and Goethe, who, after cultivating every department of literature, take in statesmanship as well. And its last word is Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Culture*, holding up totality of existence as the supreme ideal to be sought after.

There is no reason to believe that Hippias used his distinction between nature and convention as an argument for despotism. It would rather appear that, if anything, he and his school desired to establish a more complete equality among men. Others, however, both rhetoricians and practical statesmen, were not slow to draw an opposite conclusion. They saw that where no law was recognised, as between different nations, nothing but violence and the right of the stronger prevailed. It was once believed that aggressions which human law could not reach found no favour with the gods, and dread of the divine displeasure may have done something towards restraining

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

² The *Hippias Minor*.

³ I do not mean by this that Voltaire was a physiocrat or a naturalist; on the contrary, he stands for *nomos* in the sense of progressive civilisation.

them. But religion had partly been destroyed by the new culture, partly perverted into a sanction for wrong-doing. By what right, it was asked, did Zeus himself reign? Had he not unlawfully dethroned his father, Cronos, and did he not now hold power simply by virtue of superior strength? Similar reasonings were soon applied to the internal government of each state. It was alleged that the ablest citizens could lay claim to uncontrolled supremacy by a title older than any social fiction. Rules of right meant nothing but a permanent conspiracy of the weak to withdraw themselves from the legitimate dominion of their born master, and to bamboozle him into a voluntary surrender of his natural privileges. Sentiments bearing a superficial resemblance to these have occasionally found utterance among ourselves. Nevertheless, it would be most unjust to compare Carlyle, J. A. Froude, or even Nietzsche, with Critias and Calliclès. Most of us believe that their preference for despotism to representative government is an entire mistake. But we know that with them as with us the good of the governed is the sole end desired. The gentlemen of Athens sought after supreme power only as a means for gratifying their worst passions without let or hindrance; and for that purpose they were ready to ally themselves with every foreign enemy in turn, or to flatter the caprices of the Dêmos, if that policy promised to answer equally well. The antisocial theories of these 'young lions,' as they were called by their enemies and sometimes by themselves also, do not seem to have been supported by any public teacher. If we are to believe Plato, Pôlus, a Sicilian rhetor, did indeed regard Archelaus, the abler Louis Napoleon of his time, with sympathy and envious admiration, but without attempting to justify the crimes of his hero by an appeal to natural law. The corruption of theoretical morality among the paid teachers took a more subtle form. Instead of opposing one principle to another, they held that all law had the same source, being an emanation from the will of the stronger, and exclusively designed to promote his interest. Justice, according to Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, is another's good, which is true enough, and to practise it except under compulsion is foolish, which, whatever Grote may say, is an essentially immoral doctrine.

V

We have seen how the idea of nature, first evolved by physical philosophy, was taken by some, at least, among the Sophists as a basis for their ethical teaching; then how an interpretation utterly opposed to theirs was put on it by practical men, and how this second interpretation was so

generalised by the younger rhetoricians as 'to involve the denial of all morality whatever. Meanwhile, another equally important conception, destined to come into speedy and prolonged antagonism with the idea of nature, and like it to exercise a powerful influence on ethical reflection, had almost contemporaneously been elaborated out of the materials which earlier speculation supplied. From Parmenides and Heracleitus down, every philosopher who had propounded a theory of the world, had also more or less peremptorily insisted on the fact that his theory differed widely from common belief. Those who held that change is impossible, and those who taught that everything is incessantly changing; those who asserted the indestructibility of matter, and those who denied its continuity; those who took away objective reality from every quality except extension, figure and resistance, and those who affirmed that the smallest molecules partook more or less of every attribute that is revealed to sense—all these, however much they might disagree among themselves, agreed in declaring that the received opinions of mankind were an utter delusion. Thus, a sharp distinction came to be drawn between the misleading sense-impressions and the objective reality to which thought alone could penetrate. It was by combining these two elements, sensation and thought, that the idea of mind was originally constituted. And mind when so understood could not well be accounted for by any of the materialistic hypotheses at first proposed. The senses must differ profoundly from that of which they give such an unfaithful report; while reason, which Anaxagoras had so carefully differentiated from every form of corporeal existence, carried back its distinction to the subjective sphere, and became clothed with a new dignity when reintegrated in the consciousness of man.

The first result of this separation between man and the world was a complete breach with the old physical philosophy, shown, on the one hand, by an abandonment of speculative studies, on the other, by a substitution of convention for nature as the recognised standard of right. Both consequences were drawn by Protagoras, the most eminent of the Sophists. We have now to consider more particularly what was his part in the great drama of which an intelligible interpretation is being attempted.

Protagoras was born about 480 B.C. He was a fellow-townsmen of Democritus, and has been represented, though not on good authority, as a disciple of that illustrious thinker. It was rather by a study of Heracleitus that his philosophical opinions, so far as they were borrowed from others, seem to have been most decisively determined. In any case, practice, not theory, was the principal occupation of his life. He gave

instruction for payment in the higher branches of a liberal education, and adopted the name of Sophist, which before had simply meant a wise man, as an honourable title for his new calling. Protagoras was a very popular teacher. The news of his arrival in a strange city excited immense enthusiasm, and he was followed from place to place by a band of eager disciples. At Athens he was honoured by the friendship of such men as Pericles and Euripides. It was at the house of the great tragic poet that he read out a work beginning with the ominous declaration, 'I cannot tell whether the gods exist or not; life is too short for such difficult investigations.'¹ Athenian bigotry took alarm directly. The book containing this frank confession of agnosticism was publicly burned, all purchasers being compelled to give up the copies in their possession. The author himself was either banished or took flight, and, according to religious people, perished by shipwreck on the way to Sicily before completing his seventieth year.

The scepticism of Protagoras went beyond theology and extended to all science whatever. Such, at least, seems to have been the force of his celebrated declaration that 'man is the measure of all things, both as regards their existence and their non-existence.'² According to Plato,³ this doctrine followed from the identification of knowledge with sensible perception, which in its turn was based on a modified form of the Heraclitean theory of a perpetual flux. The series of external changes which constitutes nature, acting on the series of internal changes which constitutes each man's personality, produces particular sensations, and these alone are the true reality. They vary with every variation in the factors, and therefore are not the same for separate individuals. Each man's perceptions are true for himself, but for himself alone. Plato easily shows that such a theory of truth is at variance with ordinary opinion, and that if all opinions are true, it must necessarily stand self-condemned. But in fact this philosophy of perception seems to have been peculiar to the Cyrenaics, and Plato only mentions it as a possible corroboration of Protagoras, not as having been actually taught by him. And he goes on to suggest that a better case might have been made out for the incriminated doctrine could its author have been heard in self-defence. We may conjecture that Protagoras did not distinguish very accurately between existence, knowledge, and applicability to practice. If we assume, what there seems good reason to believe, that in the great controversy of Nature *versus* Law, Protagoras sided with the latter, his position will at once become clear. When the champions of nature credited her

¹ Laert. Diog., ix., 8, 54.

² *Ibid.*, 51.

³ Plato, *Theæt.*, 152A *sqq.*

with a stability and an authority greater than could be claimed for merely human arrangements, it was a judicious step to carry the war into their territory, and ask, on what foundation then does nature herself stand? Is not she, too, perpetually changing, and do we not become acquainted with her entirely through our own feelings? Ought not those feelings to be taken as the ultimate standard in all questions of right and wrong? Individual opinion is a fact which must be reckoned with, but which can be changed by persuasion, not by appeals to something that we none of us know anything about. *Man* is the measure of all things, not the will of gods whose very existence is uncertain, nor yet a purely hypothetical state of nature. Human interests must take precedence of every other consideration. Hector meant nothing else when he preferred the obvious dictates of patriotism to inferences drawn from the flight of birds.

We now understand why Protagoras, in the Platonic dialogue bearing his name, should glance scornfully at the method of instruction pursued by Hippias, with his lectures on astronomy, and why he prefers to discuss obscure passages in the poets. The quarrel between a classical and a scientific education was just then beginning, and Protagoras, as a Humanist, sided with the classics. Again, he does not think much of the 'great and sane and simple race of brutes.' He would not, like the Cynics, take them as examples of conduct. Man, he says, is naturally worse provided for than any animal; even the divine gift of wisdom would not save him from extinction without the priceless social virtues of justice and reverence, that is, the regard for public opinion which Charles Darwin, too, has represented as the strongest moralising power in primitive society. And, as the possession of these qualities constituted the fundamental distinction between men and brutes, so also did the advantage of civilisation over barbarism rest on their superior development, a development due to the ethical instruction received by every citizen from his earliest infancy, reinforced through after-life by the sterner correction of legal punishments, and completed by the elimination of all individuals demonstrably unfitted for the social state. Protagoras had no sympathy with those who affect to prefer the simplicity of savages to the fancied corruption of civilisation. Hear how he answers the Rousseaus and Diderots of his time:—

'I would have you consider that he who appears to you to be the worst of those who have been brought up in laws and humanities would appear to be a just man and a master of justice if he were to be compared with men who had no education, or courts of justice, or laws, or any restraints upon them which compelled them to practise virtue—with the savages, for example, whom the poet Pherecrates exhibited on the

stage at the last year's Lenaeon festival. If you were living among men such as the man-haters in his chorus, you would be only too glad to meet with Eurybates and Phrynondas, and you would sorrowfully long to revisit the rascality of this part of the world.'¹

We find the same theory reproduced and enforced with weighty illustrations by the great historian of that age. It is not known whether Thucydides owed any part of his culture to Protagoras, but the introduction to his history breathes the same spirit as the observations which I have just transcribed. He, too, characterises antiquity as a scene of barbarism, isolation, and lawless violence, particularly remarking that piracy was not then counted a dishonourable profession. He points to the tribes outside Greece, together with the most backward among the Greeks themselves, as representing the low condition from which Athens and her sister states had only emerged within a comparatively recent period. And in the funeral oration which he puts into the mouth of Pericles, the legendary glories of Athens are passed over without the slightest allusion,² while exclusive prominence is given to her proud position as the intellectual centre of Greece.

True, Thucydides lays bare the moral corruption of his own times—the times of his later years—but he does not, like some modern writers, attribute it to intellectual progress or to the decay of faith. No, it is the long war of Greeks against Greeks, the internal faction fights, the plague with its accompanying dissolution of all social bonds, that have wrought the mischief. In other words, it is the return to the primitive condition of mankind, to the 'state of nature.' And even at their worst the Greeks have remained far better than the uncivilised Thracians. To him the worst atrocity of the whole war was not the slaughter of the Plataeans or of the Melians, but the massacre of the school-children of Mycalessus by those cruel and cowardly barbarians.

Evidently a radical change had taken place in men's conceptions since Herodotus wrote. They were learning to despise the mythical glories of their ancestors, to exalt the present at the expense of the past, to fix their attention exclusively on immediate human interests, and, possibly, to anticipate the coming of a loftier civilisation than had as yet been seen. From this point of view additional light is thrown on the Humanist canon. The Greek word μέτρον, which we translate 'measure,' must not be understood in the strict sense of a standard, still less of a fixed standard. It means also a limit,

¹ Plato, *Protagoras*, 327; Jowett's Transl., vol. i., p. 140. On the superior morality which accompanies advancing civilisation, as evinced by the great increase of mutual trust, see Maine's *Ancient Law*, pp. 306-7.

² This point is noticed by Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.* ii. 24 (4th ed.).

and limits are not immovable. We may regard man as the highest point that existence has yet reached without limiting its possibilities to a man as he is now. Phases of existence yet undreamt of may be reached through the farther development of civilisation.

The evolution of Greek tragic poetry bears witness to the same transition from naturalism to humanism. On comparing Sophocles with Aeschylus, we are struck by a change of tone analogous to that which distinguishes Thucydides from Herodotus. It has been shown in the previous chapter how the elder dramatist delights in tracing events and institutions back to their first origin, and in following derivations through the steps of a genealogical sequence. Sophocles, on the other hand, limits himself to a close analysis of the action immediately represented, the motives by which his characters are influenced, and the arguments by which their conduct is justified or condemned. The very different attitude assumed towards religion by these two great poets has already been indicated. It remains to add that while Aeschylus fills his dramas with supernatural beings, and frequently restricts his mortal actors to the interpretation or execution of a divine mandate, Sophocles, representing the spirit of Greek Humanism, only once brings a god on the stage, and dwells exclusively on the emotions of pride, ambition, revenge, terror, pity, and affection, by which men and women of a lofty type are actuated. Again—and this is one of his poetic superiorities—Aeschylus has an open sense for the external world; his imagination ranges far and wide from land to land; his pages are filled with the fire and light, the music and movement of nature in a southern country. He leads before us in splendid procession the starry-kirtled night; the bright rulers that bring round winter and summer; the dazzling sunshine; the forked flashes of lightning; the roaring thunder; the white-winged snow-flakes; the rain descending on thirsty flowers; the sea now rippling with infinite laughter, now moaning on the shingle, growing hoary under rough blasts, with its eastern waves dashing against the new-risen sun, or, again, lulled to waveless, windless, noonday sleep; the volcano with its volleys of fire-breathing spray and fierce jaws of devouring lava; the eddying whorls of dust; the resistless mountain-torrent; the meadow-dews; the flowers of spring and fruits of summer; the evergreen olive, and trees that give leafy shelter from dogstar heat. For all this world of wonder and beauty Sophocles offers only a few meagre allusions to the phenomena presented by sunshine and storm. No poet has ever so entirely concentrated his attention on human deeds and human passions. Only the grove of Colônus, interwoven with his own earliest recollections, had power to draw from him, in

extreme old age, a song such as the nightingale might have warbled amid those inviolable recesses where the ivy and laurel, the vine and olive gave a never-failing shelter against sun and wind alike. Yet even this leafy covert is but an image of the poet's own imagination, undisturbed by outward influences, self-involved, self-protected, and self-sustained. Of course, this is only restating in different language what has long been known, that the epic element of poetry, before so prominent, was with Sophocles entirely displaced by the dramatic ; but if Sophocles became the greatest dramatist of antiquity, it was precisely because no other writer could, like him, work out a catastrophe solely through the action of mind on mind, without any intervention of physical force ; and if he possessed this faculty, it was because Greek thought as a whole had been turned inward ; because he shared in the devotion to psychological studies equally exemplified by his younger contemporaries, Protagoras, Thucydides, and Socrates, all of whom might have taken for their motto the noble lines—

‘On earth there is nothing great but man,
In man there is nothing great but mind.’

It has been said that Protagoras was a partisan of *Nomos*, or convention, against nature. That was the conservative side of his character. Still, *Nomos* was not with him what it had been with the older Greeks, an immutable tradition indistinguishable from physical law. It was a human creation, and represented the outcome of inherited experience, admitting always of change for the better. Hence the vast importance which he attributed to education. This, no doubt, was magnifying his own office, for the training of youth was his profession. But unquestionably the feelings of his more liberal contemporaries went with him. A generation before, Pindar had spoken scornfully of intellectual culture as a vain attempt to make up for the absence of that genius which the gods alone could give. Yet Pindar himself was always careful to dwell on the services rendered by professional trainers to the victorious athletes whose praises he sang, and there was really no reason why genius and culture should be permanently dissociated. A Themistocles might decide offhand on the questions brought before him ; a Pericles, dealing with much more complex interests, already needed a more careful preparation.

On the other hand, conservatives like Aristophanes continued to oppose the spread of education with acrimonious zeal. Some of their arguments have a curiously familiar ring. Intellectual pursuits, they said, were bad for the health, led to irreligion and immorality, made young people quite unlike their grandfathers, and were somehow or other connected with loose

company and a fast life. This last insinuation was in one respect the very reverse of true. So far as personal morality went, nothing could be better for it than the change introduced by Protagoras from amateur to paid teaching. Before this time, a Greek youth who wished for something better than the very elementary instruction given at school, could only attach himself to some older and wiser friend, whose conversation might be very improving, but who was pretty sure to introduce a sentimental element into their relationship equally discreditable to both.¹ A similar danger has always existed with regard to highly intelligent women, although it may have threatened a smaller number of individuals; and the efforts more and more being made to provide them with a systematic education under official superintendence will incidentally have the effect of saving our future Héloïses and Julies from the tuition of an Abélard or a Saint-Preux.

It was their habit of teaching rhetoric as an art which raised the fiercest storm of indignation against Protagoras and his colleagues. The endeavour to discover rules for addressing a tribunal or a popular assembly in the manner best calculated to win their assent had originated quite independently of any philosophical theory. On the re-establishment of order, that is to say of popular government, in Sicily, many lawsuits arose out of events which had happened years before; and, owing to the lapse of time, demonstrative evidence was not available. Accordingly, recourse was had on both sides to arguments possessing a greater or less degree of probability. The art of putting such probable inferences so as to produce persuasion demanded great technical skill; and two Sicilians, Corax and Tisias by name, composed treatises on the subject. It would appear that the new-born art was taken up by Protagoras and developed in the direction of increased dialectical subtlety. We are informed that he undertook to make the worse appear the better reason; and this very soon came to be popularly considered as an accomplishment taught by all philosophers, Socrates among the rest. But if Protagoras merely meant that he would teach the art of reasoning, one hardly sees how he could have expressed himself otherwise, consistently with the antithetical style of his age. We should say more simply that a case is strengthened by the ability to argue it properly. It has not been shown that the Protagorean dialectic offered exceptional facilities for maintaining unjust pretensions. Taken, however, in connexion with the humanistic teaching, it had an unsettling and sceptical tendency. All belief and all practice rested on law, and law was the result of a convention made

¹ This phase of Greek life is well illustrated by the addresses of Theognis to Cyrenus.

among men and ultimately produced by individual conviction. What one man had done another could undo. Religious tradition and natural right, the sole external standards, had already disappeared. There remained the test of self-consistency, and against this all the subtlety of the new dialectic was turned. The triumph of Eristic was to show that a speaker had contradicted himself, no matter how his statements might be worded. Moreover, now that reference to an objective reality was more or less disallowed, words were put in the place of things and treated like concrete realities. The next step was to tear them out of the grammatical construction, where alone they possessed any truth or meaning, each being simultaneously credited with all the uses which at any time it might be made to fulfil. For example, if a man knew one thing he knew all, for he had knowledge, and knowledge is of everything knowable. Much that seems to us tedious or superfluous in Aristotle's expositions was intended as a safeguard against this endless cavilling. Finally, negation itself was eliminated along with the possibility of falsehood and contradiction. For it was argued that 'nothing' had no existence and could not be an object of thought.¹

VI

From utter confusion to extreme nihilism there was but a single step. This step was taken by Gorgias, the Sicilian rhetorician, who held the same relation towards western Hellas and the Eleatic school as that which Protagoras held towards eastern Hellas and the philosophy of Heracleitus. He, like his eminent contemporary, was opposed to the thinkers whom, borrowing a useful term from the nomenclature of the eighteenth century, we may call the Greek physiocrats. To confute them, he wrote a book with the significant title, *On Nature or Nothing*: maintaining, first, that nothing exists; secondly, that if anything exists, we cannot know it; thirdly, that if we know it, there is no possibility of communicating our knowledge to others. The first thesis was established by pushing the Eleatic arguments against movement and change a little further; the second by showing that thought and existence are different, or else everything that is thought of would exist; the third by establishing a similar incommensurability between words and sensations. Grote has attempted to show that Gorgias was only arguing against the existence of a noumenon underlying phenomena, such as all idealists deny. Zeller has, however,

¹ Eristicism had also points of contact with the philosophies of Parmenides and Socrates which will be indicated in a future chapter. Prof. Henry Sidgwick has conjectured with extreme probability that the satire of Plato's Euthydêmus is directed against a corruption of the Socratic method.

convincingly proved that Gorgias, in common with every other thinker before Plato, was ignorant of this distinction;¹ and one may add that it would leave the second and third theses absolutely unimpaired. We must take the whole together as constituting a declaration of war against science, an assertion, in still stronger language, of the agnosticism taught by Protagoras. The truth is, that a Greek controversialist generally overproved his case, and in order to overwhelm an adversary pulled down the whole house, even at the risk of being buried among the ruins himself. A modern reasoner, taking his cue from Gorgias, without pushing the matter to such an extreme, might carry on his attack on lines running parallel with those laid down by the Sicilian Humanist. He would begin by denying the existence of a 'state of nature'; for such a state must be either variable or constant. If it is constant, how could civilisation ever have arisen? If it is variable, what becomes of the fixed standard appealed to? Then again, supposing such a state ever to have existed, how could authentic information about it have come down to us through the ages of corruption which are supposed to have intervened? And, lastly, granting that a state of nature accessible to enquiry has ever existed, how can we reorganise society on the basis of such discordant data as are presented to us by the physiocrats, no two of whom agree with regard to the first principles of natural order; one saying that it is equality, another aristocracy, and a third despotism? I do not say that these arguments are conclusive, I only mean that in relation to modern thought they very fairly represent the dialectic artillery brought to bear by Greek humanism against its naturalistic opponents.

We have seen how Prodicus and Hippias professed to teach all science, all literature, and all virtuous accomplishments. We have seen how Protagoras rejected every kind of knowledge unconnected with social culture. We now find Gorgias going a step further. In his later years, at least, he professes to teach nothing but rhetoric or the art of persuasion. I say in his later years, for at one time he seems to have taught ethics and psychology as well.² But the Gorgias of Plato's famous dialogue limits himself to the power of producing persuasion by words on all possible subjects, even those of whose details he is ignorant.

However this may be, in his public declamations the master of rhetoric gave evidence of a lofty Panhellenic enthusiasm, which at that time was equivalent to the enthusiasm for civilisation and progress characteristic of Greek humanism. And indirect evidence of his agreement with the moral standard of

¹ *Ph. d. Gr.*, i. 1104 (5th ed.).

² See Plato's *Meno*, *sub. in.*

Protagoras is afforded by the observation of his disciple Agathon in Plato's *Symposium* that, 'where there is voluntary agreement, there, as the laws, which are the lords of the city, say, is justice'—a recognition that *Nomos* rather than nature is the ultimate standard and sanction of conduct.

But it would be a great mistake to suppose that outside the schools, or even at all times within them, the two rival principles were regarded as necessarily antagonistic or mutually exclusive. Their influence became almost indistinguishably mingled in the current teaching, and practically tended in the same direction—that is towards a constant elevation and purification of public opinion. We have seen how Euripides took up the application of physics to morality. But his place seems to have been more generally among the humanists. According to one of his characters the first advantage of living in a Hellenic country is to be governed by law and justice instead of by brute force.¹ Unlike barbarians the Hellenes abhor incestuous marriages, and reject polygamy, their custom being to cherish one only wedded love.² Within Greece itself he denounces the treachery and meanness of Spartan men and the licentiousness of Spartan women.³ His Athens upholds against Thebes the Greek custom of giving up the bodies of the slain for burial⁴; and the still better custom of sparing the lives of prisoners of war is violated against the wish of the Athenians by the Theban Alcmenê.⁵ We are not here concerned with the poet's patriotic prejudices, but only with the elements of that ideal superiority which, rightly or wrongly, he claims for his native city; and these are just the qualities that a Protagoras would have singled out for praise. And we seem to hear the voice of Protagoras speaking through Tyndareus when, in the *Orestes* that old hero denounces the brutal and sanguinary custom of blood-revenge which prolongs the effect of a first homicide through illimitable time, threatening nations with destruction and the earth with desolation. This view is the more remarkable in that Euripides presents it as an express defiance of the religious sanction given by Delphi to the matricide of Orestes, and as a covert criticism of Aeschylus who had upheld the barbarous law of retaliation.

Similarly, Alcidas who succeeded to the headship of the rhetorical school over which Gorgias had presided seems to have felt no difficulty in combining his master's principles with the principles of Hippias. Like Plato's Agathon—who, indeed, may have been meant to represent him—he called the laws 'the lords of the city,'⁶ adding that philosophy is 'the bulwark of the laws'; but in revolutionary opposition to what was then

¹ *Medea*, 536.

² *Andromachê*, 173–80 and 465.

³ *Ibid.*, 445 and 600.

⁴ *Suppl.*, 526–530.

⁵ *Heracles*, 965 *sqq.*

⁶ *Oratores Attici* (ed. Didot), vol. ii., p. 318^b.

legal, he also pronounced the great word, destined to work thenceforth as an emancipating leaven: 'God sent out all men to be free; nature has made none a slave.'¹ And in just the same spirit another pupil of Gorgias, Lycophron, while extolling law as the guarantee of reciprocal obligation among citizens, and carrying scepticism so far as to deny the possibility of predication, nevertheless held, in the genuine spirit of naturalism, that the distinctions of noble and ignoble birth were mere names having no basis in truth.²

In these ulterior developments of the new morality we see philosophy abandoning its old aristocratic standpoint, and going hand in hand with an ever-spreading democratic movement, which but for the Roman conquest might have resulted in the establishment of socialism all over European Greece, and which, carried across the Adriatic, threatened Rome herself with the same levelling catastrophe.³ But if we go back to the first introduction of higher intellectual culture into Greek life we shall find that it served equally as the starting-point of a widely different movement. To understand this we must cast a glance at the political circumstances of the fifth century B.C. In the Athenian constitution, which may be taken as the type of a popular government at that period, while all legislative and judicial power was nominally held by the numerical majority of the citizens, the administration and practically the whole authority of the State remained in the hands of the higher classes who alone had leisure and ability to exercise it. But the reforms carried by high-born demagogues like Pericles had the effect of so raising the intelligence and self-confidence of the common people that mere audacity combined with a gift of language often found among the poorest and least educated of mankind seemed likely to become qualification enough for holding the chief magistracies and guiding the votes of the sovereign Assembly. Alarmed at this development the young nobles looked round for a means of recovering the authority that was slipping from their hands, and found it in the teaching of the Sophists. They alone were rich enough to pay the high fees demanded by the professors of the new culture; and money would be well spent if it enabled them to recover their former position in the State. Even as a matter of self-preservation it was becoming an urgent necessity to take lessons from experts in the art of words. Any one might be called on at any moment to answer for himself before a popular Court of Justice (so called) at the risk, in case of failure, of losing his fortune, his home, his liberty, or his life; and the most highly placed

¹ *Oratores Attici* (ed. Didot.), vol. ii., p. 316^a.

² Arist. *Pol.* iii. 9, 1280^b, 10; *Phys.* i. 2, 185^b, 28, *Frag.* 82, 1490^a, 10.

³ See my *Revaluations*, pp. 74-78.

citizens were the most exposed to this danger because their inevitable errors, if they had held office, were liable to be put in the most odious light before a people who delighted in defamation ; because their wealth, in the event of a capital sentence, went to replenish the State treasury ; because of the bitter envy with which every sort of superiority is regarded by a southern European democracy. So keenly, indeed, was the danger felt that it called into existence a class of persons like the delators of the Roman empire, universally hated but universally feared, who lived by levying blackmail on the timid rich through the threat of a public prosecution. And what made the prosecution, if it came, particularly calamitous was the law which at Athens forbade the employment of advocates in legal proceedings ; so that the accused person, if not an orator, had no resource but to learn by heart a speech prepared for him by one of the professional rhetoricians. Thus the trained speaker rejoiced in personal immunity from attack, and rejoiced also in the power over others that his accomplishment carried with it—a power bestowing nearly all the privileges of a Greek tyranny and attended by hardly any of its risks.

It may easily be supposed that an education recommended and sought after for the purpose of acquiring the highest efficiency in wielding the forensic weapons of attack and defence would rapidly degenerate into a collection of tricks for making appearances do duty for realities, and would ally itself with a philosophy which taught that appearances were in fact the only realities. It is unhappily also probable that the heads of rival schools would endeavour to fasten the charge of immoral teaching on one another, and that the enemies of serious thinking would involve all schools in a common condemnation for frivolity and fraud. As usual, Greek opinion expressed itself in a number of telling little epigrams. The Sophists were up in the clouds ; they denied the gods, *i.e.* the gods of polytheism—which was true ; they made the worse appear the better reason. As we saw, the last was quoted as an actual boast of Protagoras himself. He may, among his other paradoxes, have said something capable of being construed in that sense ; as that there is no proposition to which some exception may not be taken ; or that a trained debator will always find something to say on both sides of the case. But if equals are added to unequals the wholes are unequal. The same dialectical skill that makes a weak argument stronger makes a strong argument stronger still, leaving the disparity between them unaffected. It may even be contended that the process is one not of addition but of multiplication, so that the advantage on the right side becomes even greater than before.

The charge of being 'up in the clouds' was singularly inapplicable to the Humanists, Protagoras and Gorgias, who abjured all physical science whatsoever ; while to accuse the physiocrats, Hippias and Prodicus, of making the worse the better reason would be just one of those calumnies of which Hippias so pathetically complained.¹ Nevertheless, their principle was capable of being used, and was in fact used, for a purpose of which they little dreamed. Grant, as they contended, that nature is the reverse of law, and grant, as their opponents contended, that law is the sole guarantee of mutual justice, then nature is the very negation of justice, hers is a reign of violence, spoliation and oppression ; or, to put the same view a little differently, she has her own law and justice, which is the unrestricted dominion of the strong over the weak. Such was the moral drawn, according to Plato, by the young aristocrats who chafed under the restraints of Athenian democracy, who were too impatient or too contemptuous of the *canaille* to gain power by the weapons of persuasion, who once and again saw their noblest compeers driven into exile or made drink hemlock by the senseless fury of the Dêmos. In the face of such a situation their one idea was to seize the tyranny by any means that offered itself, armed force or, if need be, by alliance with the foreign enemy, and then to use it for the gratification of every animal appetite. In their healthy growth and mutual stimulation the ideas of nature and law, of science and culture, formed a noble alliance demanding through the mouth of Alcidas the elevation of Sparta's Messenian helots to the status of freemen ; in their disease and perversion they were conspiring to rob Hellas of what most distinguished her among the nations of earth.

Besides its influence on the formation and direction of political eloquence, the doctrine professed by Protagoras had a far-reaching effect on the subsequent development of thought. Just as Cynicism was evolved from the theory of Hippias, so also did the teaching which denied nature and concentrated all study on subjective phenomena, with a tendency towards individualistic isolation, lead on to the system of Aristippus. The founder of the Cyrenaic school is called a sophist by Aristotle, nor can the justice of the appellation be doubted. He was, it is true, a friend and companion of Socrates, but intellectually he is more nearly related to Protagoras. Aristippus rejected physical studies, reduced all knowledge to the consciousness of our own sensations, and made immediate gratification the end of life. Protagoras would have objected to the last principle—as in fact Plato makes him object to the Egoistic Hedonism of his own early days—but it was only an extension of his own views, for all history proves that Hedonism is constantly associated with

¹ Plutarch (Didot), vol. v., p. 43^a, I.

sensationalism. The theory that knowledge is built up out of feelings has an elective affinity for the theory that action is, or ought to be, determined in the last resort by the most prominent feelings, which are pleasure and pain.

Notwithstanding the importance of this impulse, it does not represent the whole effect produced by Protagoras on philosophy. His eristic method was taken up by the Megaric school, and at first combined with other elements borrowed from Parmenides and Socrates, but ultimately extricated from them and used as a critical solvent of all dogmatism by the later Sceptics. From their writings, after a long interval of enforced silence, it passed over to Montaigne, Bayle, Hume, and Kant, with what redoubtable consequences to received opinions need not here be specified.

Every variety of opinion current among the Sophists reduces itself, in the last analysis, to their fundamental antithesis between Nature and Law, the latter being somewhat ambiguously conceived by its supporters as either human reason or human will, or more generally as both together, combining to assert their self-dependence and emancipation from external authority. This antithesis was prefigured in the distinction between Chthonian and Olympian divinities. Continuing afterwards to inspire the rivalry of opposing schools, Cynic against Cyrenaic, Stoic against Epicurean, Sceptic against Dogmatist, it was but partially overcome by the mediatorial schemes of Socrates and his successors. Then came Catholicism, equally adverse to the pretensions of either party, and held them down under its suffocating pressure for more than a thousand years.

‘Natur und Geist, so spricht man nicht zu Christen,
Darum verbrennt man Atheisten ;
Natur ist Sünde, Geist ist Teufel.’

Both slowly struggled back into consciousness in the fitful dreams of mediaeval sleep. Nature was represented by astrology with its fatalistic predetermination of events ; idealism by the alchemical lore which was to give its possessor eternal youth and inexhaustible wealth. With the complete revival of classic literature and the temporary neutralisation of theology by internal discord, both sprang up again in glorious life, and produced the great art of the sixteenth century, the great science and philosophy of the seventeenth. Later on, becoming self-conscious, they divide, and their partisans draw off into two opposing armies, Rousseau against Voltaire, Herder against Kant, Goethe against Schiller, Hume against himself. Together they bring about the Revolution ; but after marching hand in hand to the destruction of all existing institutions they again part company, and, putting on the frippery of a dead faith,

confront one another, each with its own ritual, its own acolytes, its own intolerance, with feasts of Nature and goddesses of Reason, in mutual and murderous hostility. When the storm subsided, new lines of demarcation were laid down, and the cause of political liberty was dissociated from what seemed to be thoroughly discredited figments. Nevertheless, imaginative literature still preserves traces of the old conflict, and on examining the four greatest English novelists of the Victorian age we shall find that Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, though personally most unlike, agree in representing the arbitrary, subjective, ideal side of life, the subjugation of things to self, not of self to things; he transfiguring them in the light of humour, fancy, sentiment; she transforming them by the alchemy of inward passion; while Thackeray and George Eliot represent the triumph of natural forces over rebellious individualities; the one writer depicting an often crude reality at odds with convention and conceit; while the other, possessing, if not an intrinsically greater genius, at least a higher philosophical culture, discloses to us the primordial necessities of existence, the pitiless conformations of circumstance, before which egoism, ignorance, illusion, and indecision must bow, or be crushed to pieces if they resist.¹

VII

My readers have now before them everything of importance that is known about the Sophists, and something more that is not known for certain, but may, I think, be reasonably conjectured. Taking the whole class together, they represent a combination of three distinct tendencies, the endeavour to supply an encyclopaedic training for youth, the cultivation of political rhetoric as a special art, and the search after a scientific foundation for ethics derived from the results of previous philosophy. With regard to the last point, they agree in drawing a fundamental distinction between nature and law, but some take one and some the other for their guide. The partisans of nature lean to the side of a more comprehensive education, while their opponents tend more and more to lay an exclusive stress on oratorical proficiency. The occasional association of the two principles leads to an exaltation of the moral standard undreamt

¹ Since the first appearance of this passage I have had the pleasure of finding my view of the antithesis between Thackeray and Dickens as respectively representing the principle of Nature and Law adopted and confirmed by the high authority of Sir Henry Maine (*Popular Government*, pp. 153, 154, 1st ed.). But it seems to me that Sir Henry goes a little too far when he observes that 'some of Thackeray's favourite personages have about them something of Rousseau's natural man as he would have shown himself had he mixed in real life—something, that is, of the violent black-guard'—the allusion being presumably to Warrington and Philip Firmin.

of before. But both schools are at last infected by the moral corruption of the day, natural right becoming identified with the interest of the stronger, and humanism leading to the denial of objective reality, the substitution of illusion for knowledge, and the confusion of momentary gratification with moral good. The dialectical habit of considering every question under contradictory aspects degenerates into eristic prize-fighting and deliberate disregard of the conditions which alone make argument possible. Finally, the component elements of Sophisticism are dissociated from one another, and are either separately developed or pass over into new combinations. Rhetoric, apart from speculation, absorbs the whole time and talent of an Isocrates; general culture is imparted by a professorial class without originality, but without reproach; naturalism and sensuous idealism are worked up into systematic completion for the sake of their philosophical interest alone; and the name of sophistry is unhappily fastened by Aristotle on paid exhibitions of verbal wrangling which the great Sophists would have regarded with indignation and disgust.

It remains for us to glance at the controversy which has long been carried on respecting the true position of the Sophists in Greek life and thought. The by no means favourable judgment passed on them by some among their contemporaries has already been mentioned. Socrates condemned them severely, but only because they received payment for their lessons; and the sentiment was probably echoed by many who had neither his disinterestedness nor his frugality. To make profit by intellectual work was not unusual in Greece. Pheidias sold his statues; Pindar spent his life writing for money; Simonides and Sophocles were charged with showing too great eagerness in the pursuit of gain.¹ But a man's conversation with his friends had always been gratuitous, and the novel idea of charging a high fee for it excited considerable offence. Socrates called it prostitution—the sale of that which should be the free gift of love—without perhaps sufficiently considering that the same privilege had formerly been purchased with a more dishonourable price. He also considered that a freeman was degraded by placing himself at the beck and call of another, although it would appear that the Sophists chose their own time for lecturing, and were certainly not more slaves than a sculptor or poet who had received an order to execute. It was also argued that any one who really succeeded in improving the community benefited so much by the result that it was unfair on his part to demand any additional remuneration. Suppose a popular preacher were to come over from New York to England, star about among the principal cities,

¹ Aristoph., *Pax*, 697.

charging a high price for admission to his sermons, and finally return home in possession of a handsome fortune, we can well imagine that sarcasms at the expense of such profitable piety would not be wanting. This hypothetical case will help us to understand how many an honest Athenian must have felt towards the showy colonial strangers who were making such a lucrative business of teaching moderation and justice. Plato, speaking for his master but not from his master's standpoint, raised an entirely different objection. He saw no reason why the Sophists should not sell their wisdom if they had any wisdom to sell. But this was precisely what he denied. He submitted their pretensions to a searching cross-examination, and, as he considered, convicted them of being worthless pretenders. There was a certain unfairness about this method, for neither his own positive teaching nor that of Socrates could have stood before a similar test, as Aristotle speedily demonstrated in the next generation. He was, in fact, only doing for Protagoras and Gorgias what they had done for early Greek speculation, and what every school habitually does for its predecessors. It had yet to be learned that this dissolving dialectic constitutes the very law of philosophical progress. The discovery was made by Hegel, and it is to him that the Sophists owe their rehabilitation in modern times. His lectures on the History of Philosophy contain much that was afterwards urged by Grote on the same side. Five years before the appearance of Grote's famous sixty-seventh chapter, Lewes had also published a vindication of the Sophists, possibly suggested by Hegel's work, which he had certainly consulted when preparing his own History. There is, however, this great difference, that while the two English critics endeavour to minimise the sceptical, innovating tendency of the Sophists, it is, contrariwise, brought into exaggerated prominence by the German philosopher. It has just been remarked that the final dissolution of Sophisticism was brought about by the separate development given to each of the various tendencies which it temporarily combined. Now, each of our three apologists has taken up one of these tendencies, and treated it as constituting the whole movement under discussion. To Hegel, ignoring Prodicus and Hippias, the Sophists are chiefly subjective idealists. To Lewes, ignoring humanists and naturalists alike, they are rhetoricians like Isocrates. To Grote, they are, what in truth the Sophists of the Roman Empire were, teachers representing the standard opinions of their age. Lewes and Grote are both particularly anxious to prove that the original Sophists did not corrupt Greek morality. Thus much has been conceded by contemporary German criticism, and is no more than was observed by Plato long ago. Grote further

asserts that the implied corruption of morality is an illusion, and that at the end of the Peloponnesian war the Athenians were no worse than their forefathers who fought at Marathon. His opinion is shared by so accomplished a scholar as Prof. Jowett;¹ but here he has the combined authority of Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plato against him. We have, however, been over this question already, and need not return to it. Whether any of the Sophists themselves can be proved to have taught immoral doctrines is another moot point. Grote defends them all, Pôlus and Thrasymachus included. Here, also, I have expressed my dissent from the eminent historian, whom one can only suppose to have missed the whole point of Plato's argument. Lewes takes different ground when he accuses Plato of misrepresenting his opponents. It is true that the Sophists cannot be heard in self-defence, but there is no internal improbability about the charges brought against them. The Greek rhetoricians are not accused of saying anything that has not been said again and again by their modern representatives. Whether the odium of such sentiments should attach itself to the whole class of Sophists is quite another question. Grote denies that they held any doctrine in common. The German critics, on the other hand, insist on treating them as a school with common principles and tendencies. Brandis calls them 'a number of men, gifted indeed, but not seekers after knowledge for its own sake, who made a trade of giving instruction as a means for the attainment of external and selfish ends, and of substituting mere technical proficiency for real science.'² If our account be the true one, this would apply to Gorgias and the younger rhetoricians alone. One does not precisely see what external or selfish ends were subserved by the physical philosophy which Prodicus and Hippias taught, nor why the comprehensive enquiries of Protagoras into the conditions of civilisation and the limits of human knowledge should be contemptuously flung aside because he made them the basis of an honourable profession. Zeller, in much the same strain, defines a Sophist as one who professes to be a teacher of wisdom, while his object is individual culture (*die formelle und praktische Bildung des Subjekts*) and not the scientific investigation of truth.³ We do not know whether Grote was content with an explanation which would only have

¹ 'As Mr. Grote remarks, there is no reason to suspect any greater moral corruption in the age of Demosthenes than in the age of Pericles.' (*The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. iv., p. 380.) Grote commits himself to no such a sweeping statement, nor was it necessary for his purpose to do so. No one would have been more surprised than Demosthenes himself to hear that the Athenians of his generation equalled the contemporaries of Pericles in public virtue. (Cp. Grote's *Plato*, ii., p. 373: 4 vol. ed.)

² *Geschichte der Entwicklung der Griechischen Philosophie*, i., p. 204.

³ *Philosophie d. Gr.*, i., p. 1153 (5th ed.).

required an unimportant modification of his own statements to agree precisely with them. It ought amply to have satisfied Lewes. Personally, I must confess to caring very little whether the Sophists investigated truth for its own sake or as a means to self-culture. I believe, and in the next chapter I hope to show, that Socrates, at any rate, did not treat knowledge apart from practice as an end in itself. But the history of philosophy is not concerned with such subtleties as these. My contention is that the Stoic, Epicurean, and Sceptical schools may be traced back through Antisthenes and Aristippus to Hippias and Protagoras much more directly than to Socrates. Whoever grants this can no longer treat Sophisticism as a mere solvent of the old physical philosophy. We have learned from Grote to look at the Sophists without prejudice. But he too underrates their far-reaching intellectual significance, while his defence of their moral orthodoxy seems, so far as certain members of the class are concerned, inconsistent with any belief in Plato's historical fidelity. That the most eminent Sophists did nothing to corrupt Greek morality is now almost universally admitted. If I have succeeded in showing that they did not corrupt but fruitfully develop Greek philosophy, the purpose of this chapter will have been sufficiently fulfilled.

NOTE ON THE COSMOLOGY OF PRODICUS.

Thanks to Plato's satirical genius Prodicus has long been associated in the minds of students with petty verbal distinctions rather than with broad physical theories. Even so recent a historian as Windelband still treats him merely as a superficial moralist and etymologist. Welcker indeed recognised the importance of the Sophist of Ceos three-quarters of a century ago; but his juster appreciation was long overborne in Germany by the authority of Zeller. Dümmler took up the subject again in his *Akademika* (1889); and his researches have received some attention from such historians as Gomperz and Döring, whose tone as regards the Sophists in general is quite opposed to the tradition represented by Zeller; but while admitting that Prodicus taught something about nature, they look on the question what it was that he taught as insoluble.

Nevertheless, I believe that this interesting point is, like the name of Hecuba's mother and what song the Sirens sang, not beyond the reach of *all* conjecture. That our Sophist had a cosmology of his own is rendered highly probable, if not absolutely certain, by a well-known reference in the *Birds* of Aristophanes where we are promised a new theory of creation which is to send Prodicus away howling (Προδίκῳ παρ' ἐμοῦ κλάειν εἴπητε τὸ λοιπόν, Bothe, 653). Now to have such an overwhelming effect it seems evident that the new explanation must be constructed on the same lines as that with which it is put in competition; for otherwise why should one speculation be singled out for defiance where so many disputed the field? And that other explanation must have been well known at Athens if an Athenian audience was to appreciate the force of the parody. Let us see then what Aristophanes has to say about the birth of the world. He describes it as first of all a process of spontaneous generation. In the beginning all was darkness and

void, without earth, air, or heaven. Night, dwelling in the infinite gulfs of Erebus, produces a wind-egg, whence 'Love breaks forth flower-fashion, a bird with gold on his wings.' Then from the union of Love with Chaos proceeds the whole race of birds. After these at the instigation of Love a universal pairing sets in, resulting in the birth of heaven, ocean, earth, and all the gods. Here the primordial nature of Love is borrowed or rather quoted from Hesiod's *Theogony*; the originality lies in the dignity attributed to birds as older even than the very elements and the gods themselves. They are further represented as conferring great benefits on mankind by foretelling the changes of the seasons, and more generally by furnishing auguries of future events.

In this last part of the panegyric on birds Dümmler finds a direct reference to the argument reported in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (bk. iv., chap. 3), which, however, he does not regard as a genuine utterance of Socrates; and of this argument he supposes Prodicus to have been the real author (*Akademika*, pp. 156 *sqq.*). But Dümmler's view seems to suffer from two fatal weaknesses. In the first place the notion that Xenophon can no more be relied on than Plato as an exponent of the genuine Socratic teaching has failed to hold its ground even in German criticism. And in the second place there is no reason for believing Prodicus to have been a teleologist, but rather the contrary. At least we know on the authority of Persæus, a pupil of Zeno the Stoic,¹ that he looked on the gods as mortals deified and worshipped for such useful discoveries as bread and wine (*Doxographi*, p. 544); while the more doubtful authority of Epiphanius credits him with the view that the gods were personifications of the elements and of the sun and moon—an otherwise not improbable tradition (*ibid.*, p. 591). Besides it is, so to speak, as an evolutionist not as a describer of what is now going on that the comic poet enters into competition with the great Sophist.

I think we shall find a safer clue to what Aristophanes is talking about in certain fragments from the lost tragedies of Euripides. In some eloquent verses of unknown *provenance* Aphrodite (not Eros) is celebrated as a great cosmic power whence all living things together with their means of sustenance are derived (Fr. 839 in Wagner's ed.). Another passage from a chorus in the *Chrysippus* describes earth, the universal mother, as impregnated by rain from heaven, and giving birth to men and beasts. On their dissolution that which is of earth returns to earth, and that which is of heaven to heaven, for nothing really perishes, but is merely separated, and reverts to its proper form (Fr. 833). Finally, a third fragment (487), quoted from a play called *The Wise Melanippe*, describes heaven and earth as having originally formed a single body, on the break-up of which they reunite and give birth to trees, birds, beasts, fishes, and men. Taken together these passages present a general view of creation fairly resembling that of Aristophanes. The principal points of difference are (1) that Eros takes the place of Aphrodite in the comic version, and (2) that birds come first instead of second or (possibly) third in the order of production. The two changes are closely connected, Eros being represented as 'a bird with gold on his wings,' for the greater glory of the feathered tribe. The fact, however, that Prodicus rather than Euripides should be named as the philosopher on whom the winged chorus is improving seems to show that the author of *Melanippe* was indebted to the Sophist for his heroine's remarkable lecture on the natural history of creation. And there seems to be something like a hint at such an obligation in Melanippe's admission that her learning is derived from her mother, a daughter of that famous teacher the Centaur Cheiron. In this instance Cheiron may possibly symbolise no less a personage than

¹ Another piece of evidence that Stoicism is derived (possibly through the Cynics) from the physiocratic Sophists, Hippias and Prodicus.

Empedocles,¹ from whom Euripides would have derived his cosmogony—as also would Aristophanes—through some loose and popular adaptation set forth in the lectures of Prodicus. The original union of all things in a single uniform body, assumed by Melanippe, is, in my opinion, much more obviously related to the Sphairos of ‘the great Sicilian’ than to the primordial confusion of Anaxagoras with which it has been identified by some critics; while the Aphrodite of fragment 839 is still more obviously the uniting cosmic power of Empedocles, who indeed calls it over and over again by the name of the love-goddess. But what makes the dependence (direct or indirect) of Euripides on Empedocles nearly certain is the close agreement of the younger with the older poet in his enumeration of the classes called into existence by Love. In Melanippe’s speech these, as I have said, are trees, birds, beasts, fishes, and men. In the poem of Empedocles *On Nature* they are trees, men and women, beasts, birds, fishes, and gods (Diels, 21, and again in the same order in 23). One may suppose that gods were omitted from the stage version out of deference to the feelings of an Athenian audience, who would perhaps have found this lumping-up of gods with beasts and fishes—what indeed it is—somewhat disrespectful. Moreover Empedocles, as a systematic thinker, feels himself under the necessity of providing a distinct set of inhabitants for each of his four elements. Earth leads off with three kinds, trees, human beings, and beasts, while air, water, and fire follow with one each, birds, fishes, and gods, thus giving a sort of balance and symmetry to the whole. Euripides, on the other hand, not being concerned with the four elements but only with the generations of heaven and earth, has no use either for fire or its denizens and simply copies out the remaining items without any sort of logical order in their enumeration.

I do not think that he copied directly from Empedocles, but rather from Prodicus, whom we must therefore suppose to have given a sort of popularised version of the Sicilian cosmogony in his lectures at Athens, whence Aristophanes and Euripides both drew for their respective purposes. That Prodicus followed Empedocles is made otherwise very probable by his theory of religious origins already referred to. If we could accept the report of Epiphanius that he regarded the gods as personified elements there could be no doubt about the matter, for that is just what the Acragantine philosopher does. And, even apart from such evidence, his rationalistic identification of Demeter and Dionysus with bread and wine was probably suggested by the ascription of divine names to the four elements in the poem *On Nature*.

Aristophanes gives us an author without a theory, Euripides a theory without an author. By fitting the two together I have tried to supply a missing link in the history of thought.

¹ Sicily was famous for its horses.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLACE OF SOCRATES IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY

I

APART from legendary reputations, there is no name in the world's history more famous than that of Socrates, and in the history of philosophy there is none so famous. The only thinker that approaches him in celebrity is his own disciple Plato. Every one who has heard of Greece or Athens has heard of him. Every one who has heard of him knows that he was supremely good and great. Each successive generation has confirmed the reputed Delphic oracle that no man was wiser than Socrates. He, with one or two others, alone came near to realising the ideal of a Stoic sage. Christians deem it no irreverence to compare him with the Founder of their religion. If a few dissentient voices have broken the general unanimity, they have, whether consciously or not, been inspired by the Socratic principle that we should let no opinion pass unquestioned and unproved. Furthermore, it so happens that this wonderful figure is known even to the multitude by sight as well as by name. Busts, cameos, and engravings have made all familiar with the Silenus-like physiognomy, the thick lips, upturned nose, and prominent eyes which impressed themselves so strangely on the imagination of a race who are accused of having cared for nothing but physical beauty, because they rightly regarded it as the ideal accompaniment of moral loveliness. Those who wish to discover what manner of mind lay hid beneath this uninviting exterior may easily satisfy their curiosity, for Socrates is personally better known than any other character of antiquity. Dr. Johnson himself is not a more familiar figure to the student of literature. Of him alone among classical worthies has the table-talk been preserved for us, and the art of memoir-writing seems to have been created expressly for his behoof.¹ We can follow him into all sorts of company

¹ The invention of memoir-writing is claimed by Prof. Mahaffy (*Hist. Gr. Lit.*, ii., 42) for Ion of Chios and his contemporary Stesimbrotus. But the sketches attributed to these two writers do not seem to have aimed at presenting a complete picture of a single individual, which is what was attempted with considerable success in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.

and test his behaviour in every variety of circumstances. He conversed with all classes and on all subjects of human interest, with artisans, artists, generals, statesmen, professors, and professional beauties. We meet him in the armourer's workshop, in the sculptor's studio, in the boudoirs of the *demi-monde*, in the banqueting-halls of flower-crowned and wine-flushed Athenian youth, combining the self-mastery of an Antisthenes with the plastic grace of an Aristippus ; or, in graver moments, cheering his comrades during the disastrous retreat from Delium ; upholding the sanctity of law, as President of the Assembly, against a delirious populace ; confronting with invincible irony the oligarchic terrorists who held life and death in their hands ; pleading not for himself, but for reason and justice, before a stupid and bigoted tribunal ; and, in the last sad scene of all, exchanging Attic courtesies with the unwilling instrument of his death.¹

Such a character would, in any case, be remarkable ; it becomes of extraordinary, or rather of unique, interest when we consider that Socrates could be and do so much, not in spite of being a philosopher, but because he was a philosopher, the chief though not the sole originator of a vast intellectual revolution ; one who, as a teacher, constituted the supremacy of reason, and as an individual made reason his sole guide in life. He at once discovered new principles, popularised them for the benefit of others, and exemplified them in his own conduct ; but he did not accomplish these results separately ; they were only different aspects of the same systematising process which is identical with philosophy itself. Yet the very success of Socrates in harmonising life and thought makes it the more difficult for us to construct a complete picture of his personality. Different observers have selected from the complex combination that which best suited their own mental predisposition, pushing out of sight the other elements which, with him, served to correct and complete it. The very popularity that has attached itself to his name is a proof of this ; for the multitude can seldom appreciate more than one excellence at a time, nor is that usually of the highest order. Hegel complains that Socrates has been made the patron-saint of moral twaddle.² We are nearly a century further removed than Hegel from the golden age of platitude ; the twaddle of our own time is half cynical, half aesthetic, and wholly unmoral ; yet there are no signs of diminution in the popular favour with which Socrates has always been regarded. The man of the world, the wit, the *viveur*, the enthusiastic admirer of youthful beauty, the scornful critic of democracy is welcome to many who have no taste for ethical discourses and fine-spun arguments.

¹ Cp. Havet, *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, vol. i., p. 167.

² *Gesch. d. Phil.*, vol. ii., p. 47.

Nor is it only the personality of Socrates that has been so variously conceived ; his philosophy, so far as it can be separated from his life, has equally given occasion to conflicting interpretations, and it has even been denied that he had, properly speaking, any philosophy at all. These divergent presentations of his teaching, if teaching it can be called, begin with the two disciples to whom our knowledge of it is almost entirely due. There is, curiously enough, much the same inner discrepancy between Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and those Platonic dialogues where Socrates is the principal spokesman, as that which distinguishes the Synoptic from the Johannine Gospels. The one gives us a report certainly authentic, but probably incomplete ; the other account is, beyond all doubt, a highly idealised portraiture, but seems to contain some traits directly copied from the original, which may well have escaped a less philosophical observer than Plato. Aristotle also furnishes us with some scanty notices which are of use in deciding between the two rival versions, although we cannot be sure that he had access to any better sources of information than are open to ourselves. Aristophanes, although a hostile caricaturist, may, as a contemporary and an eye-witness, supply some useful facts when placed under a strict cross-examination. By variously combining and reasoning from these data modern critics have produced a third Socrates, who is often little more than the embodiment of their own favourite opinions.

In England the most generally accepted method seems to be that followed by Grote. This consists in taking the Platonic *Apologia* as a sufficiently faithful report of the defence actually made by Socrates on his trial, and piecing it on to the details supplied by Xenophon, or at least to as many of them as can be made to fit, without too obvious an accommodation of their meaning. If, however, we ask on what grounds a greater historical credibility is attributed to the *Apologia* than to the *Republic* or the *Phaedo*, none can be offered except the seemingly transparent truthfulness of the narrative itself, an argument which will not weigh much with those who remember how brilliant was Plato's talent for fiction, and how unscrupulously it could be employed for purposes of edification. The *Phaedo* puts an autobiographical statement into the mouth of Socrates which we only know to be imaginary because it involves the acceptance of a theory unknown to the real Socrates. Why, then, may not Plato have thought proper to introduce equally fictitious details into the speech delivered by his master before the dicastery, if, indeed, the speech, as we have it, be not a fancy composition from beginning to end ?

Before we can come to a decision on this point it will be necessary briefly to recapitulate the statements in question.

Socrates is defending himself against a capital charge. He fears that a prejudice respecting him may exist in the minds of the jury, and tries to explain how it arose without any fault of his, as follows :—A certain friend of his had asked the oracle at Delphi whether there was any man wiser than Socrates? The answer was that no man was wiser. Not being conscious of possessing any wisdom, great or small, he felt considerably surprised on hearing of this declaration, and thought to convince the god of falsehood by finding out some one wiser than himself. He first went to an eminent politician, who, however, proved, on examination, to be utterly ignorant, with the further disadvantage that it was impossible to convince him of his ignorance. On applying the same test to others a precisely similar result was obtained. It was only the handicraftsmen who could give a satisfactory account of themselves, and their knowledge of one trade made them fancy that they understood everything else equally well. Thus the meaning of the oracle was shown to be that God alone is truly wise, and that of all men he is wisest who, like Socrates, perceives that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. Ever since then, Socrates has made it his business to vindicate the divine veracity by seeking out and exposing every pretender to knowledge that he can find, a line of conduct which has made him extremely unpopular in Athens, while it has also won him a great reputation for wisdom, as people supposed that the matters on which he convicted others of ignorance were perfectly clear to himself.

The first difficulty that strikes one in connexion with this extraordinary story arises out of the oracle on which it all hinges. For the fact that an oracle, highly eulogistic of Socrates, was actually delivered at Delphi, we have the confirmatory evidence of Xenophon, the genuineness of whose *Apologia* is now admitted. But that it should have been delivered at a time when Socrates was still unknown to fame is incredible, unless indeed we assume that the Pythia was really inspired. And the story, as told by Xenophon, leaves it possible that the oracle belongs to a late period of the philosopher's life. Again, in Xenophon's version Socrates is extolled not for wisdom but for his unsurpassed independence, justice, and *Sôphrosynê*—praise which he accepts as his due—a good opinion of himself indirectly asserted by the Platonic Socrates also when he claims to be maintained in the Prytaneum for the rest of his life at the public expense. Our doubts about the whole story are still further strengthened when we find that the historical Socrates did not by any means profess the sweeping scepticism attributed to him by Plato. So far from believing that ignorance was the common and necessary lot of

all mankind, himself included, he held that action should, so far as possible, be entirely guided by knowledge;¹ that the man who did not always know what he was about resembled a slave; that the various virtues were only different forms of knowledge; that he himself possessed this knowledge, and was perfectly competent to share it with his friends. We do, indeed, find him very ready to convince ignorant and presumptuous persons of their deficiencies, but only that he may lead them, if well disposed, into the path of right understanding. He also thought that there were certain secrets which would remain for ever inaccessible to the human intellect, facts connected with the structure of the universe which the gods had reserved for their own exclusive cognisance. This, however, was, according to him, a kind of knowledge which, even if it could be obtained, would not be particularly worth having, and the search after which would leave us no leisure for more useful acquisitions. Nor does the Platonic Socrates seem to have been at the trouble of arguing against natural science. The subjects of his elenchus are the professors of such arts as politics, rhetoric, and poetry. Further, we have something stronger than a simple inference from the facts recorded by Xenophon; we have his express testimony to the fact that Socrates did not limit himself to confuting people who fancied they knew everything; here we must either have a direct reference to the *Apologia*, or to a theory identical with that which it embodies. Some stress has been laid on a phrase quoted by Xenophon himself as having been used by Hippias, which at first sight seems to support Plato's view. The Elia Sophist charges Socrates with practising a continual irony, refuting others and not submitting to be questioned himself;² an accusation which, I may observe in passing, is not borne out by the discussion that subsequently takes place between them. Here, however, we must remember that Socrates used to convey instruction under the form of a series of leading questions, the answers to which showed that his interlocutor understood and assented to the doctrine propounded. Such a method might easily give rise to the misconception that he refused to disclose his own particular opinions, and contented himself with eliciting those held by others. Finally, it is to be noted that the idea of fulfilling a religious mission, or exposing human ignorance *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, on which Grote lays such stress, has no place in Xenophon's conception of his master, although, had such an idea been really present, one can hardly imagine how it could have been passed over by a writer with whom piety amounted to superstition. It is, on the other hand, an idea which would naturally occur to a great religious reformer who proposed to

¹ *Mem.*, iv. 6, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 4, 10.

base his reconstruction of society on faith in a supernatural order, and the desire to realise it here below.

So far we have contrasted the *Apologia* with the *Memorabilia*. We have now to consider in what relation it stands to Plato's other writings. The constructive dogmatic Socrates, who is a principal spokesman in some of them, differs widely from the sceptical Socrates of the famous *Defence*, and the difference has been urged as an argument for the historical authenticity of the latter.¹ Plato, it is implied, would not have departed so far from his usual conception of the sage, had he not been desirous of reproducing the actual words spoken on so solemn an occasion. There are, however, several dialogues which seem to have been composed for the express purpose of illustrating the negative method supposed to have been described by Socrates to his judges, investigations the sole result of which is to upset the theories of other thinkers, or to show that ordinary men act without being able to assign a reason for their conduct. Even the *Republic* is professedly tentative in its procedure, and only follows out a train of thought which has presented itself almost by accident to the company. Unlike Charles Lamb's Scotchman, the leading spokesman does not bring, but find, and you are invited to cry halves to whatever turns up in his company.

Plato had, in truth, a conception of science which no knowledge then attained—perhaps one may add, no knowledge ever attainable—could completely satisfy. Even the rigour of mathematical demonstration did not content him, for mathematical truth itself rested on unproved assumptions, as we also, by the way, have lately discovered. Perhaps the Hegelian system would have fulfilled his requirements; perhaps not even that. Moreover, that the new order which he contemplated might be established, it was necessary to begin by making a clean sweep of all existing opinions. With the urbanity of an Athenian, the piety of a disciple, and the instinct of a great dramatic artist, he preferred to assume that this indispensable task had already been done by another. And of all preceding thinkers, who was so well qualified for the undertaking as Socrates? Who else had wielded the weapons of negative dialectic with such consummate dexterity? Who had assumed such a critical attitude towards the beliefs of his contemporaries? Who had been so anxious to find a point of attachment for every new truth in the minds of his interlocutors? Who therefore could, with such plausibility, be put forward in the guise of one who laid claim to no wisdom on his own account? The son of Phaenaretê seemed made to be the Baptist of a Greek Messiah; but Plato, in treating him as such, has drawn a discreet veil over the whole positive side of his predecessor's teaching, and

¹ Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, i. 2, p. 118, note 1 (4th ed.), *sub fin.*

to discover what this was we must place ourselves under the guidance of Xenophon's more faithful report.

Not that Xenophon is to be taken as a perfectly accurate exponent of the Socratic philosophy. His work, it must be remembered, was primarily intended to vindicate Socrates from a charge of impiety and immoral teaching, not to expound a system which he was perhaps incompetent to appreciate or understand. We are bound to accept everything that he relates; we are bound to include nothing that he does not relate; but we may fairly readjust the proportions of his sketch. It is here that a judicious use of Plato will furnish us with the most valuable assistance. He grasped Socratism in all its parts and developed it in all directions, so that by following back the lines of his system to their origin we shall be put on the proper track and shall know where to look for the suggestions which were destined to be so magnificently worked out.¹

II

Before entering on our task of reconstruction, we must turn aside to consider with what success the same enterprise has been attempted by modern German criticism, especially as represented by the most learned elaborate and complete historian of Greek philosophy. The result at which Zeller, following Schleiermacher, arrives is that the great achievement of Socrates was to put forward an adequate idea of knowledge; in other words, to show what true science ought to be, and what, as yet, it had never been, with the addition of a demand that all action should be based on such a scientific knowledge as its only sure foundation.² To know a thing was to know its essence, its concept, the assemblage of qualities which together constitute its definition, and make it to be what it is. Former thinkers had also sought for knowledge, but not *as* knowledge, not with

¹ It may possibly be asked, Why, if Plato gave only an ideal picture of Socrates, are we to accept his versions of the Sophistic teaching as literally exact? The answer is that he was compelled, by the nature of the case, to create an imaginary Socrates, while he could have no conceivable object in ascribing views which he did not himself hold to well-known historical personages. Assuming an unlimited right of making fictitious statements for the public good, his principles would surely not have permitted him wantonly to calumniate his innocent contemporaries by foisting on them odious theories for which they were not responsible. Had nobody held such opinions as those attributed to Thrasymachus in the *Republic* there would have been no object in attacking them; and if anybody held them, why not Thrasymachus as well as another? With regard to the veracity of the *Apologia*, Grote, in his work on Plato (i. p. 419, note, 4 vol. ed.) quotes a passage from Aristides the rhetor, stating that all the companions of Socrates agreed about the Delphic oracle, and the Socratic disclaimer of knowledge. This, however, proves too much, for it shows that Aristides quite overlooked the absence of any such acknowledgment of complete ignorance in Xenophon, and therefore cannot be trusted to give an accurate report of the other authorities.

² *Ph. d. Gr.*, ii. 2, p. 105 sqq.

a clear notion of what it was that they really wanted. Socrates, on the other hand, required that men should always be prepared to give a strict account of the end which they had in view, and of the means by which they hoped to gain it. Further, it had been customary to single out for exclusive attention that quality of an object by which the observer happened to be most strongly impressed, passing over all the others; the consequence of which was that the philosophers had taken a one-sided view of facts, with the result of falling into hopeless disagreement among themselves; the Sophists had turned these contradictory points of view against one another, and thus effected their mutual destruction; while the dissolution of objective certainty had led to a corresponding dissolution of moral truth. Socrates accepts the Sophistic scepticism so far as it applies to the existing state of science, but does not push it to the same fatal conclusion; he grants that current beliefs should be thoroughly sifted and, if necessary, discarded, but only that more solid convictions may be substituted for them. Here a place is found for his method of self-examination, and for the self-conscious ignorance attributed to him by Plato. Comparing his notions on particular subjects with his idea of what knowledge in general ought to be, he finds that they do not satisfy it; he knows that he knows nothing. He then has recourse to other men who declare that they possess the knowledge of which he is in search, but their pretended certainty vanishes under the application of his dialectic test. This is the famous Socratic irony. Finally, he attempts to come at real knowledge, that is to say, the construction of definitions, by employing that inductive method with the invention of which he is credited by Aristotle. This method consists in bringing together a number of simple and familiar examples from common experience, generalising from them, and correcting the generalisations by comparison with negative instances. The reasons that led Socrates to restrict his enquiries to human interests are rather lightly passed over by Zeller; he seems at a loss how to reconcile the alleged reform of scientific method with the complete abandonment of those physical investigations which, we are told, had suffered so severely from being cultivated on a different system.

There seem to be three principal points aimed at in the very ingenious theory here summarised. Zeller apparently wishes to bring Socrates into line with the great tradition of early Greek thought, to distinguish him markedly from the Sophists, and to trace back to his initiative the intellectual method of Plato and Aristotle. In my opinion the threefold attempt has not succeeded. It seems to me that a picture into which so much Platonic colouring has been thrown would for

that reason alone, and without any further objection, be open to very grave suspicion. But even accepting the historical accuracy of everything that Plato has said, or of as much as may be required, our critic's inferences are not justified by his authorities. Neither the Xenophontic nor the Platonic Socrates seeks knowledge for its own sake, nor does either of them offer a satisfactory definition of knowledge, or, indeed, any definition at all. Aristotle was the first to explain what science meant, and he did so, not by developing the Socratic notion, but by incorporating it with the other methods independently struck out by physical philosophy. What would science be without the study of causation? and was not this ostentatiously neglected by the founder of conceptualism? Again, Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, makes his Socrates criticise various theories of knowledge, but does not even hint that the critic had himself a better theory than any of them in reserve. The author of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* was less interested in reforming the methods of scientific investigation than in directing research towards that which he believed to be alone worth knowing, the eternal ideas which underlie phenomena, and even more than the ideas themselves, their necessary connexion in a logical evolution. The historical Socrates had no suspicion of transcendental realities; but he thought that a knowledge of physics was unattainable, and would be worthless if attained. By knowledge he meant art rather than science, and his method of defining was intended not for science but for art. Those, he said, who can clearly express what they want to do are best secured against failure, and best able to communicate their skill to others. He made out that the various virtues were different kinds of knowledge, not from any extraordinary opinion of its preciousness, but because he thought that knowledge was the variable element in volition and that everything else was constant. Zeller dwells strongly on the Socratic identification of cognition with conduct; but how could any one who fell at the first step into such a confusion of ideas be fitted either to explain what science meant or to come forward as the reformer of its methods? Nor is it correct to say that Socrates approached an object from every point of view, and took note of all its characteristic qualities. On the contrary, one would be inclined to charge him with the opposite tendency, with fixing his gaze too exclusively on some one quality, that to him, as a teacher, was the most interesting. His identification of virtue with knowledge is an excellent instance of this habit. So also is his identification of beauty with serviceableness, and his general disposition to judge of everything by a rather narrow standard of utility. On the other hand, Greek physical speculation would have gained nothing by a minute attention to definitions, and most probably

would have been mischievously hampered by it. Aristotle, at any rate, is much nearer the truth when he follows on the Ionian or Sicilian track than when he attempts to define what in the then existing state of knowledge could not be satisfactorily defined. To talk about the various elements—earth, air, fire, and water—as things with which everybody was already familiar, may have been a crude unscientific procedure; to analyse them into different combinations of the hot and the cold, the light and the heavy, the dry and the moist, was not only erroneous but fatally misleading; it was arresting enquiry, and doing precisely what the Sophists had been accused of doing, that is, substituting the conceit for the reality of wisdom. It was, no doubt, necessary that mathematical terms should be defined; but where are we told that geometricians had to learn this truth from Socrates? The sciences of quantity, which could hardly have advanced a step without the help of exact conceptions, were successfully cultivated before he was born, and his influence was used to discourage rather than to promote their accurate study. With regard to the comprehensive all-sided examination of objects on which Zeller lays so much stress, and which he seems to regard as something peculiar to the conceptual method, it had unquestionably been neglected by Parmenides and Heracleitus; but had not the deficiency been already made good by their immediate successors? What else is the philosophy of Empedocles, the Atomists, and Anaxagoras, but an attempt—we must add, a by no means unsuccessful attempt—to recombine the opposing aspects of nature which had been too exclusively insisted on at Ephesus and Elea? Again, to say that the Sophists had destroyed physical speculation by setting these partial aspects of truth against one another is equally erroneous. First of all, Zeller here falls into the old mistake, long ago corrected by Grote, of treating the class in question as if they all held similar views. It has been shown in the preceding chapter that the Sophists were divided into two principal schools, of which one was devoted to the cultivation of physics. Protagoras and Gorgias were the only sceptics; and it was not by setting one theory against another, but by working out a single theory to its last consequences, that their scepticism was reached; with no more effect, be it observed, than was exercised by Pyrrho on the science of his day. For the two great thinkers, with the aid of whose conclusions it was attempted to discredit objective reality, were already left far behind at the close of the fifth century; and neither their reasonings nor reasonings based on theirs could exercise much influence on a generation which had Anaxagoras on Nature and the encyclopaedia of Democritus in its hands. There was, however, one critic who really did

what the Sophists are charged with doing ; who derided and denounced physical science on the ground that its professors were hopelessly at issue with one another ; and this critic was no other than Socrates himself.¹ He maintained, on purely popular and superficial grounds, the same sceptical attitude to which Protagoras gave at least the semblance of a psychological justification. And he wished that attention should be concentrated on the very subjects which Protagoras undertook to teach—namely, ethics, politics, and dialectics. Once more, to say that Socrates was conscious of not coming up to his own standard of true knowledge is inconsistent with Xenophon's account, where he is represented as quite ready to answer every question put to him, and to offer a definition of everything that he considered worth defining. His scepticism, if it ever existed, was as artificial and short-lived as the scepticism of Descartes.

The truth is that no man who philosophised at all was ever more free from tormenting doubts and self-questionings ; no man was ever more thoroughly satisfied with himself than Socrates. Let us add that, from a Hellenic point of view, no man had ever more reason for self-satisfaction. None, he observed in his last days, had ever lived a better or a happier life. Naturally possessed of a powerful constitution, he had so strengthened it by habitual moderation and constant training that up to the hour of his death, at the age of seventy, he enjoyed perfect bodily and mental health. Neither hardship nor exposure, neither abstinence nor indulgence in what to other men would have been excess, could make any impression on that adamant frame. We know not how much truth there may be in the story that, at one time, he was remarkable for the violence of his passions ;² at any rate, when our principal informants knew him he was conspicuous for the ease with which he resisted temptation, and for the imperturbable sweetness of his temper. His wants, being systematically reduced to a minimum, were easily satisfied, and his cheerfulness never failed. He enjoyed Athenian society so much that nothing but military duty could draw him away from it. For Socrates was a veteran who had served through three arduous campaigns, and could give lectures on the duties of a general, which so high an authority as Xenophon thought worth reporting. He seems to have been on excellent terms with his fellow-citizens, never having been engaged in a lawsuit, either as plaintiff or defendant, until the fatal prosecution which brought his career

¹ Xenoph. *Mem.*, i. 1, 14, 15, 16.

² It rests on a quotation made by Cyril from Porphyry, according to which the story comes from Aristoxenus, who had it from his father Spintharus. Prof. Gilbert Murray accepts it (*Ancient Gr. Lit.*, p. 171, 3rd ed.).

to a close. He could, on that occasion, refuse to prepare a defence, proudly observing that his whole life had been a preparation, that no man had ever seen him commit an unjust or impious deed. The anguished cries of doubt uttered by Italian and Sicilian thinkers could have no meaning for one who, on principle, abstained from ontological speculations; the uncertainty of human destiny which hung like a thunder-cloud over Pindar and the tragic poets had melted away under the sunshine of arguments, demonstrating, to his satisfaction, the reality and beneficence of a supernatural Providence. For he believed that the gods would afford guidance in doubtful conjunctures to all who approached their oracles in a reverent spirit; while, over and above the Divine counsels accessible to all men, he was personally attended by an oracular voice, a mysterious monitor, which told him what to avoid, though not what to do, a circumstance well worthy of note, for it shows that he did not, like Plato, attribute every kind of right action to divine inspiration.

It may be said that all this only proves Socrates to have been, in his own estimation, a good and happy, but not necessarily a wise man. With him, however, the last of these conditions was inseparable from the other two. He was prepared to demonstrate, step by step, that his conduct was regulated by fixed and ascertainable principles, and was of the kind best adapted to secure happiness both for himself and for others. That there were deficiencies in his ethical theory may readily be admitted. The idea of universal beneficence seems never to have dawned on his horizon; and chastity was to him what sobriety is to us, mainly a self-regarding virtue. We do not find that he ever recommended conjugal fidelity to husbands; he regarded prostitution very much as it is still, unhappily, regarded by men of the world among ourselves; and in opposing the darker vices of his countrymen, it was the excess rather than the perversion of appetite which he condemned. These, however, are points which do not interfere with my general contention that Socrates adopted the ethical standard of his time, that he adopted it on rational grounds, that having adopted he acted up to it, and that in so reasoning and acting he satisfied his own ideal of absolute wisdom.

Even as regards physical phenomena, Socrates, so far from professing complete ignorance, held a very positive theory which he was quite ready to share with his friends. He taught what is called the doctrine of final causes; and, so far as our knowledge goes, he was either the first to teach it, or, at any rate, the first to prove the existence of divine agencies by its means. The old poets had occasionally attributed the origin

of man and other animals to supernatural intelligence, but, apparently, without being led to their conviction by any evidence of design displayed in the structure of organised creatures. Socrates, on the other hand, went through the various external organs of the human body with great minuteness, and showed, to his own satisfaction, that they evinced the workings of a wise and beneficent Artist. More will have to be said further on about this whole argument ; here I only wish to observe that, intrinsically, it does not differ very much from the speculations which its author derided as the fruit of an impertinent curiosity ; and that no one who now employed it would, for a single moment, be called an agnostic or a sceptic.

Must we, then, conclude that Socrates was, after all, nothing but a sort of glorified Greek Paley, whose principal achievement was to present the popular ideas of his time on morals and politics under the form of a rather grovelling utilitarianism ; and whose 'evidences of natural and revealed religion' bore much the same relation to Greek mythology that the corresponding lucubrations of the worthy archdeacon bore to Christian theology ? Even were this the whole truth, it should be remembered that there was an interval of twenty-three centuries between the two teachers, which ought to be taken due account of in estimating their relative importance. Socrates, with his closely-reasoned, vividly-illustrated ethical expositions, had gained a tactical advantage over the vague declamations of Gnostic poetry and the isolated aphorisms of the Seven Sages, comparable to that possessed by Xenophon and his Ten Thousand in dealing with the unwieldy masses of Persian infantry and the undisciplined mountaineers of Carduchia ; while his idea of a uniformly beneficent Creator marked a still greater advance on the jealous divinities of Herodotus. On the other hand, as against Hume and Bentham, Paley's pseudo-scientific paraphernalia were like the muskets and cannon of an Asiatic army when confronted by the English conquerors of India. Yet had Socrates done no more than contribute to philosophy the idea just quoted, his place in the evolution of thought, though honourable, would not have been what it is justly held to be—unique.

III

So far we have been occupied with what seems untrue or inadequate in the views of others ; it is now time that, what seems to the present writer a more satisfactory view should be stated. Perhaps it is not after all a very novel thesis to maintain that Socrates first brought out the idea, not of knowledge, but of mind in its full significance ; that he first studied the whole

circle of human interests as affected by mind ; that, in creating dialectics, he gave this study its proper method, and simultaneously gave his method the only subject-matter on which it could be profitably exercised ; finally, that by these immortal achievements philosophy was constituted, and received a three-fold verification—first, from the life of its founder ; secondly, from the success with which his spirit was communicated to a band of followers ; thirdly, from the whole subsequent history of thought. Before substantiating these assertions point by point, it will be expedient to glance at the external influences which may be supposed to have moulded the great intellect and the great character now under consideration.

Socrates was, before all things, an Athenian. To understand him we must first understand what the Athenian character was in itself and independently of disturbing circumstances. Our estimate of that character is too apt to be biassed by the totally exceptional position which Athens occupied during the fifth century B.C. The possession of empire developed qualities in her children which they had not exhibited at an earlier period, and which they ceased to exhibit when empire had been lost. Among these must be reckoned military genius, an adventurous and romantic spirit, and a high capacity for poetical and artistic production—qualities displayed, it is true, by every Greek race, but by some for a longer and by others for a shorter period. Now, the tradition of greatness does not seem to have gone very far back with Athens. Her legendary history, what we have of it, is singularly unexciting. The same rather monotonous though edifying story of shelter accorded to persecuted fugitives, of successful resistance to foreign invasions, and of devoted self-sacrifice to the State, meets us again and again. The Attic drama itself shows how much more stirring was the legendary lore of other tribes. One need only look at the few remaining pieces which treat of patriotic subjects to appreciate the difference ; and an English reader may easily convince himself of it by comparing Swinburne's *Erechtheus* with the same author's *Atalanta*. There is a want of vivid individuality perceptible all through. Even Theseus, the great national hero, strikes one as a rather tame sort of personage compared with Perseus, Heracles, and Jason. No Athenian figures prominently in the *Iliad* ; and on the only two occasions when Pindar was employed to commemorate an Athenian victory at the Panhellenic games, he seems unable to associate it with any legendary glories in the annals of the city. The circumstances which for a long time made Attic history so barren of incident are the same to which its subsequent importance is due. The relation in which Attica stood to the rest of Greece was somewhat similar to the relation in which Tuscany, long afterwards, stood to the rest of Italy.

It was the region least disturbed by foreign immigration, and therefore it became the seat of a slower but steadier mental development. Intellectual activity was most speedily ripened among those to whom war, revolution, colonisation, and commerce brought the most many-sided experience. Literature, art, and science were cultivated with extraordinary success by the Greek cities of Asia Minor, and even in some parts of the old country, before Athens had a single man of genius, except Solon, to boast of. But along with the enjoyment of undisturbed tranquillity, habits of self-government, orderliness, and reasonable reflection were establishing themselves, which finally enabled her to inherit all that her predecessors in the race had accomplished, and to add, what alone they still wanted, the crowning consecration of self-conscious mind. There had, simultaneously, been growing up an intensely patriotic sentiment, due, in part, to the long-continued independence of Attica; in part, also, we may suppose, to the union, at a very early period, of her different townships into a single city. The same causes had, however, also favoured a certain love of comfort, a jovial pleasure-seeking disposition often degenerating into coarse sensuality, a thriftiness, and an inclination to grasp at any source of profit, coupled with extreme credulity where hopes of profit were excited, together forming an element of prose-comedy which mingles strangely with the tragic grandeur of Athens in her imperial age, and emerges into greater prominence after her fall, until it becomes the predominant characteristic of her later days. It is, we may observe, the contrast between these two aspects of Athenian life which gives the plays of Aristophanes their unparalleled comic effect, and it is their very awkward conjunction which makes Euripides so unequal and disappointing a poet. We find, then, that the original Athenian character is marked by reasonable reflection, by patriotism, and by a tendency towards self-seeking materialism. Let us take note of these three qualities, for we shall meet with them again in the philosophy of Socrates.

Empire, when it came to Athens, came almost unsought. The Persian invasions had made her a great naval power; the free choice of her allies placed her at the head of a great maritime confederacy. The sudden command of vast resources and the tension accumulated during ages of repose, stimulated all her faculties into preternatural activity. Her spirit was steeled almost to the Dorian temper, and entered into victorious rivalry with the Dorian Muse. Not only did her fleet sweep the sea, but her army, for once, defeated Theban hoplites in the field. The grand choral harmonies of Sicilian song, the Sicyonian recitals of epic adventure, were rolled back into a framework for the spectacle of individual souls meeting one another in argument, expostulation, entreaty, and defiance; a nobler Doric

edifice rose to confront the Aeginetan temple of Athênê; the strained energy of Aeginetan combatants was relaxed into attitudes of reposing power, and the eternal smile on their faces was deepened into the sadness of unfathomable thought. But to the violet-crowned city, Athênê was a giver of wealth and wisdom rather than of prowess; her empire rested on the contributions of unwilling allies, and on a technical proficiency which others were sure to equal in time; so that the Corinthian orators could say with justice that Athenian skill was more easily acquired than Dorian valour. At once receptive and communicative, Athens absorbed all that Greece could teach her, and then returned it in a more elaborate form, but without the freshness of its earliest inspiration. Yet there was one field that still afforded scope for creative originality. Habits of analysis, though fatal to spontaneous production, were favourable, or rather were necessary, to the growth of a new philosophy. After the exhaustion of every limited idealism, there remained that highest idealisation which is the reduction of all past experience to a method available for the guidance of all future action. To accomplish this last enterprise it was necessary that a single individual should gather up in himself the spirit diffused through a whole people, bestowing on it by that very concentration the capability of an infinitely wider extension when its provisional representative should have passed away from the scene.

Socrates represents the popular Athenian character much as Richardson, in a different sphere, represents the English middle-class character—represents it, that is to say, elevated into transcendent genius. Except this elevation, there was nothing anomalous about him. If he was exclusively critical, rationalising, unadventurous, prosaic; in a word, as the German historians say, something of a Philistine; so, we may suspect, were the mass of his countrymen. His illustrations were taken from such plebeian employments as cattle-breeding, cobbling, weaving, and sailing. These were his ‘touches of things common’ which at last ‘rose to touch the spheres.’ He both practised and inculcated virtues, the value of which is especially evident in humble life—frugality and endurance. But he also represents the Dêmos in its sovereign capacity as legislator and judge. Without aspiring to be an orator or statesman, he reserves the ultimate power of arbitration and election. He submits candidates for office to a severe scrutiny, and demands from all men an even stricter account of their lives than retiring magistrates had to give of their conduct, when in power, to the people. He applies the judicial method of cross-examination to the detection of error, and the parliamentary method of joint deliberation to the discovery of truth. He follows out the

democratic principles of free speech and self-government, by submitting every question that arises to public discussion, and insisting on no conclusion that does not command the willing assent of his audience. Finally, his conversation, popular in form, was popular also in this respect, that everybody who chose to listen might have the benefit of it gratuitously.¹ Here we have a great change from the scornful dogmatism of Heracleitus, and the virtually oligarchic exclusiveness of the teachers who demanded high fees for their instruction.

To be free and to rule over freemen were, with Socrates, as with every Athenian, the goals of ambition, only his freedom meant absolute immunity from the control of passion or habit; government meant superior knowledge, and government of freemen meant the power of producing intellectual conviction. In his eyes, the possessor of any art was, so far, a ruler, and the only true ruler, being obeyed under severe penalties by all who stood in the need of his skill. But the royal art which he himself exercised, without expressly laying claim to it, was that which assigns its proper sphere to every other art, and provides each individual with the employment which his peculiar faculties demand. This is Athenian liberty and Athenian imperialism carried into education, but so idealised and purified that they can hardly be recognised at first sight.

The philosophy of Socrates is more obviously related to the practical and religious tendencies of his countrymen. Neither he nor they had any sympathy with the cosmological speculations which seem to be unconnected with human interests, and to trench on matters beyond the reach of human knowledge. The old Attic sentiment was averse from adventures of any kind, whether political or intellectual. Yet the new spirit of enquiry awakened by Ionian thought could not fail to react powerfully on the most intelligent man among the most intelligent people of Hellas. Above all, one paramount idea which went beyond the confines of the old philosophy had been evolved by the differentiation of knowledge from its object, and had been presented, although under a materialising form, by Anaxagoras to the Athenian public. Socrates took up this idea, which expressed what was highest and most distinctive in the national character, and applied it to the development of ethical speculation. We saw in the last chapter how an attempt was made to base moral truth on the results of natural philosophy, and how that attempt was combated by the Humanist school. It could not be doubtful which side Socrates would take in this controversy. That he paid any attention to the teaching of Protagoras and Gorgias is, indeed, highly problematic, for

¹ That Socrates took no fees is indirectly evidenced by the satirical references of Aristophanes to the squalor of his personal appearance.

their names are but casually mentioned by Xenophon, and the Platonic dialogues in which they figure as conversing with him are evidently fictitious. Nevertheless, he had to a certain extent arrived at the same conclusion with them, although by a different path. He was opposed, on religious grounds, to the theories which an acute psychological analysis had led them to reject. Accordingly, the idea of nature is almost entirely absent from his conversation, and, like Protagoras, he is guided solely by regard for human interests. To the objection that positive laws were always changing, he victoriously replied that it was because they were undergoing an incessant adaptation to varying needs.¹ Like Protagoras, again, he was a habitual student of old Greek literature, and sedulously sought out the practical lessons in which it abounded. To him, as to the early poets and sages, *Sôphrosynê*, or self-knowledge and self-command taken together, was the first and most necessary of all virtues. Unlike them, however, he does not simply accept it from tradition, but gives it a philosophical foundation—the newly-established distinction between mind and body; a distinction not to be confounded with the old Psychism, although Plato, for his reforming purposes, shortly afterwards linked the two together. The disembodied spirit of mythology was a mere shadow or memory, equally destitute of solidity and of understanding; with Socrates, mind meant the personal consciousness which retains its continuous identity through every change, and as against every passing impulse. Like the Humanists, he made it the seat of knowledge—more than the Humanists, he gave it the control of appetite. In other words, he adds the idea of will to that of intellect; but instead of treating them as distinct faculties or functions, he absolutely identifies them. Mind having come to be first recognised as a knowing power, carried over its association with knowledge into the volitional sphere, and the two were first disentangled by Aristotle, though very imperfectly even by him. Yet no thinker helped so much to make the confusion apparent as the one to whom it was due. Socrates deliberately insisted that those who knew the good must necessarily be good themselves. He taught that every virtue was a science; courage, for example, was a knowledge of the things which should or should not be feared; temperance, a knowledge of what should or should not be desired, and so forth. Such an account of virtue would, perhaps, be sufficient if all men did what, in their opinion, they ought to do; and, however strange it may seem, Socrates assumed that such was actually the case.² The paradox, even if accepted at the moment by his youthful friends, was sure to be rejected, on

¹ In the conversation with Hippias already referred to.

² *Mem.*, iii. 9, 4.

examination, by cooler heads, and its rejection would prove that the whole doctrine was essentially unsound. Various causes prevented Socrates from perceiving what seemed so clear to duller intelligences than his. First of all, he did not separate duty from personal interest. A true Athenian, he recommended temperance and righteousness very largely on account of the material advantages they secured. That the agreeable and the honourable, the expedient and the just, frequently came into collision, was at that time a rhetorical commonplace; and it might be supposed that, if they were shown to coincide, no motive to misconduct but ignorance could exist. Then, again, being accustomed to compare conduct of every kind with the practice of such arts as flute-playing, he had come to take knowledge in a rather extended sense, just as we do when we say, indifferently, that a man knows geometry and that he knows how to draw. Aristotle himself did not see more clearly than Socrates that moral habits are only to be acquired by incessant practice; but the earlier thinker would have observed that knowledge of every kind is gained by the same laborious repetition of particular actions. To the obvious objection that, in this case, morality cannot, like theoretical truth, be imparted by the teacher to his pupils, but must be won by the learner for himself, he would probably have replied that all truth is really evolved by the mind from itself, and that he, for that very reason, disclaimed the name of a teacher, and limited himself to the seemingly humbler task of awakening dormant capacities in others.

An additional influence, not the less potent because unacknowledged, was the same craving for a principle of unity that had impelled early Greek thought to seek for the sole substance or cause of physical phenomena in some single material element, whether water, air, or fire; and just as these various principles were finally decomposed into the multitudinous atoms of Leucippus, so also, but much more speedily, did the general principle of knowledge tend to decompose itself into innumerable cognitions of the partial ends or utilities which action was directed to achieve. The need of a comprehensive generalisation again made itself felt, and all good was summed up under the head of happiness. The same difficulties recurred under another form. To define happiness proved not less difficult than to define use or practical knowledge. Three points of view offered themselves, and all three had been more or less anticipated by Socrates. Happiness might mean unmixed pleasure, or the exclusive cultivation of man's higher nature, or voluntary subordination to a larger whole. The founder of Athenian philosophy used to present each of these, in turn, as an end, without recognising the possibility of a conflict between

them; and it certainly would be a mistake to represent them as constantly opposed. Yet a truly scientific principle must either prove their identity, or make its choice among them, or discover something better. Plato seems to have taken up the three methods, one after the other, without coming to any very satisfactory conclusion. Aristotle identified the first two, but failed, or rather did not attempt to harmonise them with the third. Succeeding schools tried various combinations, laying more or less stress on different principles at different periods, till the will of an omnipotent Creator was substituted for every human standard. With the decline of dogmatic theology we have seen them all come to life again, and the old battle is still being fought out under our eyes. Speaking broadly, it may be said that the method placed first on the list is more particularly represented in England, the second in France, and the last in Germany. Yet they refuse to be separated by any rigid line of demarcation, and each tends either to combine with or to pass into one or both of the rival theories. Modern utilitarianism, as constituted by John Stuart Mill, although avowedly based on the paramount value of pleasure, in admitting qualitative differences among enjoyments, and in subordinating individual to social good, introduces principles of action which are not, properly speaking, hedonistic. Neither is the idea of the whole by any means free from ambiguity. We have party, church, nation, order, progress, race, humanity, and the sum total of sensitive beings, all putting in their claims to figure as that entity. Where the pursuit of any single end gives rise to conflicting pretensions, a wise man will check them by reference to the other accredited standards, and will cherish a not unreasonable expectation that the evolution of life is tending to bring them all into ultimate agreement.

Returning to Socrates, we must further note that his identification of virtue with science, though it does not express the whole truth, expresses a considerable part of it, especially as to him conduct was a much more complex problem than it is to some modern teachers. Only those who believe in the existence of intuitive and infallible moral perceptions can consistently maintain that nothing is easier than to know our duty, and nothing harder than to do it. Even then, the intuitions must extend beyond general principles, and also inform us how and where to apply them. That no such inward illumination exists is sufficiently shown by experience; so much so that the mischief done by foolish people with good intentions has become proverbial. Modern casuists have, indeed, drawn a distinction between the intention and the act, making us responsible for the purity of the former, not for the consequences of the latter. Though based on the Socratic division between

mind and body, this distinction would not have commended itself to Socrates. His object was not to save souls from sin, but to save individuals, families, and states from the ruin which ignorance of fact entails.

If we enlarge our point of view so as to cover the moral influence of knowledge on society taken collectively, its relative importance will be vastly increased. When Auguste Comte assigns the supreme direction of progress to advancing science, and when Buckle, following Fichte, makes the totality of human action depend on the totality of human knowledge, they are virtually attributing to intellectual education an even more decisive part than it played in the Socratic ethics. Even those who reject the theory, when pushed to such an extreme, will admit that the same quantity of self-devotion must produce a far greater effect when it is guided by deeper insight into the conditions of existence.

The same principle may be extended in a different direction if we substitute for knowledge, in its narrower significance, the more general conception of associated feeling. We shall then see that belief, habit, emotion, and instinct are only different stages of the same process—the process by which experience is organised and made subservient to vital activity. The simplest reflex and the highest intellectual conviction are alike based on sensori-motor mechanism, and, so far, differ only through the relative complexity and instability of the nervous connexions involved. Knowledge is life in the making, and when it fails to control practice fails only by coming into conflict with passion—that is to say, with the consolidated results of an earlier experience. Physiology offers another analogy to the Socratic method which must not be overlooked. Socrates recommended the formation of definite conceptions because, among other advantages, they facilitated the diffusion of useful knowledge. So, also, the organised associations of feelings are not only serviceable to individuals, but may be transmitted to offspring with a regularity proportioned to their definiteness. How naturally these deductions follow from the doctrine under consideration, is evident from their having been, to a certain extent, already drawn by Plato. His plan for the systematic education of feeling under scientific supervision answers to the first; his plan for breeding an improved race of citizens by placing marriage under State control answers to the second. Yet it is doubtful whether Plato's predecessor would have sanctioned any scheme tending to substitute external compulsion, whether felt or not, for freedom and individual initiative, and inherited instinct for the self-consciousness which can give an account of its procedure at every step. He would bring us back from social physics and physiology to psychology, and from psychology to dialectic philosophy.

IV

To Socrates himself the strongest reason for believing in the identity of conviction and practice was, perhaps, that he had made it a living reality. With him to know the right and to do it were the same. In this sense it has already been said that his life was the first verification of his philosophy. And just as the results of his ethical teaching can only be ideally separated from their application to his conduct, so also these results themselves cannot be kept apart from the method by which they were reached; nor is the process by which he reached them for himself distinguishable from the process by which he communicated them to his friends. In touching on this point, we touch on that which is greatest and most distinctively original in the Socratic system, or rather in the Socratic impulse to systematisation of every kind. What it was will be made clearer by reverting to the central conception of mind. With Protagoras—or at least with his Cyrenaic successors—mind meant an ever-changing stream of feeling; with Gorgias it was a principle of hopeless isolation, the interchange of thoughts between one consciousness and another, by means of signs, being an illusion. Socrates, on the contrary, attributed to it a steadfast control over passion, and a unifying function in society through its essentially synthetic activity, its need of co-operation and responsive assurance. He saw that the reason which overcomes animal desire tends to draw men together just as sensuality tends to drive them into hostile collision. If he recommended temperance on account of the increased egoistic pleasure which it secures, he recommended it also as making the individual a more efficient instrument for serving the community. If he inculcated obedience to the established laws, it was no doubt partly on grounds of enlightened self-interest, but also because union and harmony among citizens were thereby secured. And if he insisted on the necessity of forming definite conceptions, it was with the same twofold reference to personal and public advantage. Along with the diffusive, social character of mind he recognised its essential spontaneity. In a commonwealth where all citizens were free and equal, there must also be freedom and equality of reason. Having worked out a theory of life for himself, he desired that all other men should, so far as possible, pass through the same bracing discipline. Here we have the secret of his famous erotetic method. He did not, like the Sophists, give continuous lectures, nor profess, like some of them, to answer every question that might be put to him. On the contrary, he put a series of questions to all who came in his way, generally in the form of an alternative, one side of which seemed self-evidently true and

the other self-evidently false, arranged so as to lead the respondent, step by step, to the conclusion which it was desired that he should accept. Socrates did not invent this method. It had long been practised in the Athenian law-courts as a means for extracting from the opposite party admissions which could not be otherwise obtained, whence it had passed into the tragic drama, and into the discussion of philosophical problems. Nowhere else was the analytical power of Greek thought so brilliantly displayed ; for before a contested proposition could be subjected to this mode of treatment, it had to be carefully discriminated from confusing adjuncts, considered under all the various meanings which it might possibly be made to bear, subdivided, if it was complex, into two or more distinct assertions, and linked by a minute chain of demonstration to the admission by which its validity was established or overthrown.

Socrates, then, did not create the cross-examining elenchus, but he gave it two new and important applications. So far as we can make out, it had hitherto been only used (again, after the example of the law courts) for the purpose of detecting error or intentional deceit. He made it an instrument for introducing his own convictions into the minds of others, but so that his interlocutors seemed to be discovering them for themselves, and were certainly learning how, in their turn, to practise the same didactic interrogation on a future occasion. And he also used it for the purpose of logical self-discipline in a manner which will be presently explained. Of course, Socrates also employed the erotetic method as a means of confutation, and, in his hands, it powerfully illustrated the negative moment of Greek thought. To prepare the ground for new truth it was necessary to clear away the misconceptions which were likely to interfere with its admission ; or, if Socrates himself had nothing to impart, he could at any rate purge away the false conceit of knowledge from unformed minds, and hold them back from attempting difficult tasks until they were properly qualified for the undertaking. For example, a certain Glauco, a brother of Plato, had attempted to address the public assembly, when he was not yet twenty years of age, and was naturally quite unfitted for the task. At Athens, where every citizen had a voice in his country's affairs, obstruction, whether intentional or not, was very summarily dealt with. Speakers who had nothing to say that was worth hearing were forcibly removed from the *bêma* by the police ; and this fate had already more than once befallen the youthful orator, much to the annoyance of his friends, who could not prevail on him to refrain from repeating the experiment, when Socrates took the matter in hand. One or two adroit compliments on his ambition drew Glauco into a conversation with the veteran dialectician on the aims and

duties of a statesman. It was agreed that his first object should be to benefit the country, and that a good way of achieving this end would be to increase its wealth, which, again, could be done either by augmenting the receipts or by diminishing the expenditure. Could Glauco tell what was the present revenue of Athens, and whence it was derived?—No; he had not studied that question.—Well then, perhaps, he had some useful retrenchments to propose.—No; he had not studied that either. But the State might, he thought, be enriched at the expense of its enemies.—A good idea, if we can be sure of beating them first! Only, to avoid the risk of attacking somebody who is stronger than ourselves, we must know what are the enemy's military resources as compared with our own. To begin with the latter: Can Glauco tell how many ships and soldiers Athens has at her disposal?—No, he does not at this moment remember.—Then, perhaps, he has it all written down somewhere?—He must confess not. So the conversation goes on until Socrates has convicted his ambitious young friend of possessing no accurate information whatever about political questions.¹ The mind of Socrates resembles a diamond, that cuts everything, but is cut by nothing itself, and that resolves every ray it receives into bands of coloured light.

Xenophon has recorded another dialogue in which a young man named Euthydêmus, who was also in training for a statesman, and who, as he supposed, had learned a great deal more out of books than Socrates could teach him, is brought to see how little he knows about ethical science. He is asked, Can a man be a good citizen without being just? No, he cannot.—Can Euthydêmus tell what acts are just? Yes, certainly, and also what are unjust.—Under which head does he put such actions as lying, deceiving, harming, enslaving?—Under the head of injustice.—But suppose a hostile people are treated in the various manners specified, is that unjust?—No, but it was understood that only one's friends were meant.—Well, if a general encourages his own army by false statements, or a father deceives his child into taking medicine, or your friend seems likely to commit suicide, and you purloin a deadly weapon from him, is that unjust?—No, we must add 'for the purpose of harming' to our definition. Socrates, however, does not stop here, but goes on cross-examining until the unhappy student is reduced to a state of hopeless bewilderment and shame. He is then brought to perceive the necessity of self-knowledge, which is explained to mean knowledge of one's own powers. As a further exercise Euthydêmus is put through his facings on the subject of good and evil. Health, wealth,

¹ *Mem.*, iii., 6.

strength, wisdom and beauty are mentioned as unquestionable goods. Socrates shows, in a style long afterwards imitated by Juvenal, that they are only means towards an end, and may be productive of harm no less than good.—Happiness at any rate is an unquestionable good.—Yes, unless we make it consist of questionable goods like those just enumerated.¹

It is in this last conversation that the historical Socrates most nearly resembles the Socrates of Plato's *Apologia*. Instead, however, of leaving Euthydêmus to the consciousness of his ignorance, as the latter would have done, he proceeds, in Xenophon's account, to direct the young man's studies according to the simplest and clearest principles; and we have another conversation where religious truths are instilled by the same catechetical process.² Here the erotetic method is evidently a mere didactic artifice, and Socrates could easily have written out his lesson under the form of a regular demonstration. But there is little doubt that in other cases he used it as a means for giving increased precision to his own ideas, and also for testing their validity, that, in a word, the habit of oral communication gave him a familiarity with logical processes which could not otherwise have been acquired. The same cross-examination that acted as a spur on the mind of the respondent, reacted as a bridle on the mind of the interrogator, obliging him to make sure beforehand of every assertion that he put forward, to study the mutual bearings of his beliefs, to analyse them into their component elements, and to examine the relation in which they collectively stood to the opinions generally accepted. It has already been stated that Socrates gave the erotetic method two new applications; we now see in what direction they tended. He made it a vehicle for positive instruction, and he also made it an instrument for self-discipline, a help to fulfilling the Delphic precept, 'Know thyself.' The second application was even more important than the first. With us literary training—that is, the practice of continuous reading and composition—is so widely diffused, that conversation has become rather a hindrance than a help to the cultivation of argumentative ability. The reverse was true when Socrates lived. Long familiarity with debate was unfavourable to the art of writing; and the speeches in Thucydides show how difficult it was still found to present close reasoning under the form of an uninterrupted exposition. The traditions of conversational thrust and parry survived in rhetorical prose; and the crossed swords of tongue-fence were represented by the bristling *chevaux de frise* of a laboured antithetical arrangement where every clause received new strength and point from contrast with its opposing neighbour.

¹ *Mem.*, iv., 2.

² *Mem.*, iv., 3.

By combining the various considerations here suggested we shall arrive at a clearer understanding of the sceptical attitude commonly attributed to Socrates. There is, first of all, the negative and critical function exercised by him in common with many other constructive thinkers, and intimately associated with a fundamental law of Greek thought. Then there is the Attic courtesy and democratic spirit leading him to avoid any assumption of superiority over those whose opinions he is examining. And, lastly, there is the profound feeling that truth is a common possession, which no individual can appropriate as his peculiar privilege, because it can only be discovered, tested, and preserved by the united efforts of all.

V

Thus, then, the Socratic dialogue has a double aspect. It is, like all philosophy, a perpetual carrying of life into ideas and of ideas into life. Life is raised to a higher level by thought; thought, when brought into contact with life, gains movement and growth, assimilative and reproductive power. If action is to be harmonised, we must regulate it by universal principles; if our principles are to be efficacious, they must be adopted; if they are to be adopted, we must demonstrate them to the satisfaction of our contemporaries. Language, consisting as it does almost entirely of abstract terms, furnishes the materials out of which alone such an ideal union can be framed. But men do not always use the same words, least of all if they are abstract words, in the same sense, and therefore a preliminary agreement must be arrived at in this respect; a fact which Socrates was the first to recognise. Aristotle tells us that he introduced the custom of constructing general definitions into philosophy.¹ The need of accurate verbal explanations is more felt in the discussion of ethical problems than anywhere else, if we take ethics in the only sense that Socrates would have accepted, as covering the whole field of mental activity. It is true that definitions are also employed in the mathematical and physical sciences, but there they are accompanied by illustrations borrowed from sensible experience, and would be unintelligible without them. Hence it has been possible for those branches of knowledge to make enormous progress, while the elementary notions on which they rest have not yet been satisfactorily analysed. The case is entirely altered when mental dispositions have to be taken into account. Here, abstract terms play much the same part as sensible intuitions elsewhere in steadying our conceptions, but without possessing the same invariable value; the experiences from which those conceptions are derived being

¹ *Metaph.*, p. 98^b, 3, 107⁸, 17.

exceedingly complex, and, what is more, exceedingly liable to disturbance from unforeseen circumstances. Thus, by neglecting a series of minute changes the same name may come to denote groups of phenomena not agreeing in the qualities which alone it originally connoted. More than one example of such a gradual metamorphosis has already presented itself in the course of our investigation, and others will occur in the sequel. Where distinctions of right and wrong are involved, it is of enormous practical importance that a definite meaning should be attached to words, and that they should not be allowed, at least without express agreement, to depart from the recognised acceptation: for such words, connoting as they do the approval or disapproval of mankind, exercise a powerful influence on conduct, so that their misapplication may lead to disastrous consequences. Where government by written law prevails the importance of defining ethical terms immediately becomes obvious, for, otherwise, personal rule would be restored under the disguise of judicial interpretation. Roman jurisprudence was the first attempt on a great scale to introduce a rigorous system of definitions into legislation. We have seen, in the preceding chapter, how it tended to put the conclusions of Greek naturalistic philosophy into practical shape. We now see how, on the formal side, its determinations are connected with the principles of Socrates. And we shall not undervalue this obligation if we bear in mind that the accurate wording of legal enactments is not less important than the essential justice of their contents. Similarly, the development of Catholic theology required that its fundamental conceptions should be progressively defined. This alone preserved the intellectual character of Catholicism in ages of ignorance and superstition, and helped to keep alive the reason by which superstition was eventually overthrown. Mommsen has called theology the bastard child of Religion and Science. It is something that, in the absence of the robust parent, its features should be recalled and its tradition maintained even by an illegitimate offspring.

So far, I have spoken as if the Socratic definitions were merely verbal; they were, however, a great deal more, and their author did not accurately discriminate between what at that stage of thought could not well be kept apart—explanations of words, practical reforms, and scientific generalisations. For example, in defining a ruler to be one who knew more than other men, he was departing from the common usages of language, and showing not what was, but what ought to be true.¹ And in defining virtue as wisdom, he was putting forward a new theory of his own, instead of formulating the received

¹ *Mem.*, iii., 9, 10.

connotation of a term. Still, after making every deduction, we cannot fail to perceive what an immense service was rendered to exact thought by introducing definitions of every kind into that department of enquiry where they were chiefly needed. We may observe also that a general law of Greek intelligence was here realising itself in a new direction. The need of accurate determination had always been felt, but hitherto it had worked under the more elementary forms of time, space, and causality, or, more generally, under the form of contiguous association. The earlier cosmologies were all processes of circumscription; they were attempts to fix the limits of the universe, and, accordingly, that element which was supposed to surround the others was also conceived as their producing cause, or else (in the theory of Heracleitus) as typifying the rationale of their continuous transformation. For this reason Parmenides, when he identified existence with extension, found himself obliged to declare that extension was necessarily limited. Of all the physical thinkers, Anaxagoras, who immediately precedes Socrates, approaches, on the objective side, most nearly to his standpoint. For the governing *Nous* brings order out of chaos by segregating the confused elements, by separating the unlike and drawing the like together, which is precisely what definition does for our conceptions. Meanwhile Greek literature had been performing the same task in a more restricted province, first fixing events according to their geographical and historical positions, then assigning to each its proper cause, then, as Thucydides does, isolating the most important groups of events from their external connexions, and analysing the causes of complex changes into different classes of antecedents. The final revolution effected by Socrates was to substitute arrangement by difference and resemblance for arrangement by contiguity in coexistence and succession. To say that by so doing he created science is inexact, for science requires to consider nature under every aspect, including those which he systematically neglected; but we may say that he introduced the method which is most particularly applicable to mental phenomena, the method of ideal analysis, classification, and reasoning. For, be it observed that Socrates did not limit himself to searching for the One in the Many; he also, and perhaps more habitually, sought for the Many in the One. He would take hold of a conception and analyse it into its various notes, laying them, as it were, piecemeal before his interlocutor for separate acceptance or rejection. If, for example, they could not agree about the relative merits of two citizens, Socrates would decompose the character of a good citizen into its component parts and bring the comparison down to them. A good citizen, he would say, increases the national resources by his administration of the finances, defeats

the enemy abroad, wins allies by his diplomacy, appeases dissension by his eloquence at home.¹ When the shy and gifted Charmides shrank from addressing a public audience on public questions, Socrates strove to overcome his nervousness by mercilessly subdividing the august Ecclêsia into its constituent classes. 'Is it the fullers that you are afraid of?' he asked, 'or the leather-cutters, or the masons, or the smiths, or the husbandmen, or the traders, or the lowest class of hucksters?'²

Nor did Socrates only consider the whole conception in relation to its parts, he also grouped conceptions together according to their genera and founded logical classification. To appreciate the bearing of this idea on human interests it will be enough to study the disposition of a code. We shall then see how much more easy it becomes to bring individual cases under a general rule, and to retain the whole body of rules in our memory, when we can pass step by step from the most universal to the most particular categories. Now, it was by jurists versed in the Stoic philosophy that Roman law was codified, and it was by Stoicism that the logical traditions of Socratic philosophy were most faithfully preserved.

Logical division is, however, a process not fully represented by any fixed and formal distribution of topics, nor yet is it equivalent to the arrangement of genera and species according to their natural affinities, as in the admirable systems of Jussieu and Cuvier. It is something much more flexible and subtle, a carrying down into the minutest detail, of that psychological law which requires, as a condition of perfect consciousness, that feelings, conceptions, judgments, and, generally speaking, all mental modes should be apprehended together with their contradictory opposites. Heracleitus had a dim perception of this truth when he taught the identity of antithetical couples, and it is more or less vividly illustrated by all Greek classic literature after him; but Socrates seems to have been the first who transformed it from a law of existence into a law of cognition; with him knowledge and ignorance, reason and passion, freedom and slavery, virtue and vice, right and wrong (*πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφή μία*) were apprehended in inseparable connexion, and were employed for mutual elucidation, not only in broad masses, but also through their last subdivisions, like the delicate adjustments of light and shade on a Venetian canvas. This method of classification by graduated descent and symmetrical contrast, like the whole dialectic system of which it forms a branch, is only suited to the mental phenomena for which it was originally

¹ *Mem.*, iv., 6, 14.

² Xenophon, *Mem.*, iii., 7. A passage well worth the attention of those who look on the Athenian Dêmos as an idle and aristocratic body, supported by slave labour.

devised ; and Hegel committed a fatal error when he applied it to explain the order of external coexistence and succession. The essentially subjective character of the Socratic definition has already been touched on, and a similar restriction will presently have to be made in dealing with the Socratic induction.

After definition and division comes reasoning. We arrange objects in classes, that by knowing one or some we may know all. Aristotle attributes to Socrates the first systematic employment of induction as well as of general definitions.¹ Nevertheless, his method was not solely inductive, nor did it bear more than a distant resemblance to the induction of modern science. His principles were not gathered from the particular classes of phenomena which they determined, or were intended to determine, but from others of an analogous character which had already been reduced to order. Observing that all handicrafts were practised according to well-defined intelligible rules, leading, so far as they went, to satisfactory results, he required that life in its entirety should be similarly systematised. This was not so much reasoning as a demand for the more extended application of reasoning. It was a truly philosophic postulate, for philosophy is not science, but precedes and underlies it. Belief and action tend to divide themselves into two provinces, of which the one is more or less organised, the other more or less chaotic. We philosophise when we try to bring the one into order, and also when we test the foundations on which the order of the other reposes, fighting both against incoherent mysticism and against traditional routine. Such is the purpose that the most distinguished thinkers of modern times—Francis Bacon, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Auguste Comte, and Herbert Spencer—however widely they may otherwise differ, have, according to their respective lights, all set themselves to achieve. No doubt, there is this vast difference between Socrates and his modern successors, that physical science is the great type of certainty to the level of which they would raise all speculation, while with him it was the type of a delusion and an impossibility. The analogy of artistic production when applied to nature led him off on a completely false track, the ascription to conscious design of that which is, in truth, a result of mechanical causation.² But now that the relations between the known and the unknown have been completely transformed, there is no excuse for repeating the fallacies which imposed on his vigorous understanding ; and the genuine spirit of Socrates is best represented by those who, starting like him from the data of experience, are led to adopt a diametrically opposite conclusion. We may add, that the Socratic method of analogical reasoning

¹ *Metaph.*, xiii., 4.

² *Mem.*, i., 4.

gave a retrospective justification to early Greek thought, of which Socrates was not himself aware. Its daring generalisations were really an inference from the known to the unknown. To interpret all physical processes in terms of matter and motion, is only assuming that the changes to which our senses cannot penetrate are homogeneous with the changes which we can feel and see. When Socrates argued that, because the human body is animated by a consciousness, the material universe must be similarly animated, Democritus might have answered that the world presents no appearance of being organised like an animal. When he argued that, because statues and pictures are known to be the work of intelligence, the living models from which they are copied must be similarly due to design, Aristodêmus should have answered, that the former are seen to be manufactured, while the latter are seen to grow. It might also have been observed, that if our own intelligence requires to be accounted for by a cause like itself, so also does the creative cause, and so on through an infinite regress of antecedents. Teleology has been destroyed by the Darwinian theory; but before the *Origin of Species* appeared, the slightest scrutiny might have shown that it was a precarious foundation for religious belief. If many thoughtful men are now turning away from theism, 'natural theology' may be thanked for the desertion. 'I believe in God,' says the German baron in *Thorndale*, 'until your philosophers demonstrate His existence.' 'And then?' asks a friend. 'And then—I do not believe the demonstration.'

Whatever may have been the errors into which Socrates fell, he did not commit the fatal mistake of compromising his ethical doctrine by associating it indissolubly with his metaphysical opinions. Religion, with him, instead of being the source and sanction of all duty, simply brought in an additional duty—that of gratitude to the gods for their goodness. We shall presently see where he sought for the ultimate foundation of morality, after completing our survey of the dialectic method with which it was so closely connected. The induction of Socrates, when it went beyond that kind of analogical reasoning which we have just been considering, was mainly abstraction, the process by which he obtained those general conceptions or definitions that played so great a part in his philosophy. Thus, on comparing the different virtues, as commonly distinguished, he found that they all agreed in requiring knowledge, which he accordingly concluded to be the essence of virtue. So other moralists have been led to conclude that right actions resemble one another in their felicitic quality, and in that alone. Similarly, political economists find, or formerly found, that a common characteristic of all industrial employments

is the desire to secure the maximum of profit with the minimum of trouble. Another comparison shows that value depends on the relation between supply and demand. Aesthetic enjoyments of every kind resemble one another by including an element of ideal emotion. It is a common characteristic of all cognitions that they are constructed by association out of elementary feelings. All societies are marked by a more or less developed division of labour. These are given as typical generalisations which have been reached by the Socratic method. They are all taken from the philosophic sciences—that is, the sciences dealing with phenomena which are partly determined by mind, and the systematic treatment of which is so similar that they are frequently studied in combination by a single thinker, and invariably so by the greatest thinkers of all. But were we to examine the history of the physical sciences, we should find that this method of wide comparison and rapid abstraction cannot, as Francis Bacon imagined, be successfully applied to them. The facts with which they deal are not transparent, not directly penetrable by thought; hence they must be treated deductively. Instead of a front attack, we must, so to speak, take them in the rear. Bacon never made a more unfortunate observation than when he said that the syllogism falls far short of the subtlety of nature. Nature is even simpler than the syllogism, for she accomplishes her results by advancing from equation to equation. That which really does fall far short of her subtlety is precisely the Baconian induction with its superficial comparison of instances. No amount of observation could detect any resemblance between the bursting of a thunderstorm and the attraction of a loadstone, or between the burning of charcoal and the rusting of a nail.

But while philosophers cannot prescribe a method to physical science, they may, to a certain extent, bring it under their cognisance, by disengaging its fundamental conceptions and assumptions, and showing that they are functions of mind; by arranging the special sciences in systematic order for purposes of study; and by investigating the law of their historical evolution. Furthermore, since psychology is the central science of philosophy, and since it is closely connected with physiology, which in turn reposes on the inorganic sciences, a certain knowledge of the objective world is indispensable to any knowledge of ourselves. Lastly, since the subjective sphere not only rests, once for all, on the objective, but is also in a continual state of action and reaction with it, no philosophy can be complete which does not take into account the constitution of things as they exist independently of ourselves, in order to ascertain how far they are unalterable, and how far they may be modified to our advantage. We see, then, that Socrates, in restricting

philosophy to human interests, was guided by a just tact ; that in creating the method of dialectic abstraction, he created an instrument adequate to this investigation, but to this alone ; and, finally, that human interests, understood in the largest sense, embrace a number of subsidiary studies which either did not exist when he taught, or which the inevitable superstitions of his age would not allow him to pursue.

It remains to glance at another aspect of the dialectic method first developed on a great scale by Plato, and first fully defined by Aristotle, but already playing a certain part in the Socratic teaching. This is the testing of common assumptions by pushing them to their logical conclusion, and rejecting those which lead to consequences inconsistent with themselves. So understood, dialectic means the complete elimination of inconsistency, and has ever since remained the most powerful weapon of philosophical criticism. To take an instance near at hand, it is constantly employed by thinkers so radically different as Herbert Spencer and Professor T. H. Green ; while it has been generalised into an objective law of nature and history, with dazzling though only momentary success, by Hegel and his school.

VI

Consistency is, indeed, the one word which, better than any other, expresses the whole character of Socrates, and the whole of philosophy as well. Here the supreme conception of mind reappears under its most rigorous, but, at the same time, its most beneficent aspect. It is the temperance that no allurements can surprise ; the fortitude that no terror can break through ; the justice that eliminates all personal considerations, egoistic and altruistic alike ; the truthfulness that, with exactest harmony, fits words to meanings, meanings to thoughts, and thoughts to things ; the logic that will tolerate no self-contradiction ; the conviction that seeks for no acceptance unwon by reason ; the liberalism that works through free agencies for freedom ; the love that wills another's good for that other's sake alone.¹ It was the intellectual passion for consistency that made Socrates so great and that fused his life into a flawless whole ; but it was an unconscious motive power, and therefore he attributed to mere knowledge what knowledge alone could not supply. A clear perception of right cannot by itself secure the obedience of our will. High principles are not of any value, except to those in whom a discrepancy between practice and profession produces the sharpest

¹ 'Il sait que, dans l'intérêt même du bien, il ne faut pas imposer le bien d'une manière trop absolue, le jeu libre de la liberté étant la condition de la vie humaine . . . poursuite en toutes choses du bien public, non des applaudissements.'—Renan, *Marc Aurèle*, pp. 18, 19.

anguish of which their nature is capable; a feeling like, though immeasurably stronger than that which women of exquisite sensibility experience when they see a candle set crooked or a table-cover awry. How moral laws have come to be established, and why they prescribe or prohibit certain classes of actions, are questions which still divide the schools, though with an increasing consensus of authority on the utilitarian side: their ultimate sanction—that which, whatever they are, makes obedience to them truly moral—can hardly be sought elsewhere than in the same consciousness of logical stringency that determines, or should determine, our abstract beliefs.

Be this as it may, I venture to hope that a principle has been here suggested deep and strong enough to reunite the two halves into which historians have hitherto divided the Socratic system, or, rather, the beginning of that universal systematisation called philosophy, which is not yet, and perhaps never will be, completed; a principle which is outwardly revealed in the character of the philosopher himself. With such an one, ethics and dialectics become almost indistinguishable through the intermixture of their processes and the mutual subordination of their aims. Integrity of conviction enters, both as a means and as an element, into perfect integrity of conduct, nor can it be maintained where any other element of rectitude is wanting. Clearness, consecutiveness, and coherence are the morality of belief; while temperance, justice, and beneficence, taken in their widest sense and taken together, constitute the supreme logic of life.

It has already been observed that the thoughts of Socrates were thrown into shape for and by communication, that they only became definite when brought into vivifying contact with another intelligence. Such was especially the case with his method of ethical dialectic. Instead of tendering his advice in the form of a lecture, as other moralists have at all times been so fond of doing, he sought out some pre-existing sentiment or opinion inconsistent with the conduct of which he disapproved, and then gradually worked round from point to point, until theory and practice were exhibited in immediate contrast. Here, his reasoning, which is sometimes spoken of as exclusively inductive, was strictly syllogistic, being the application of a general law to a particular instance. With the growing emancipation of reason, we may observe a return to the Socratic method of moralisation. Instead of rewards and punishments, which encourage selfish calculation, or examples, which stimulate a mischievous jealousy when they do not create a spirit of servile imitation, the judicious trainer will find his motive power in the pupil's incipient tendency to form moral judgments, which, when reflected on the

individual's own actions, become what we call a conscience. It has been mentioned in the preceding chapter that the celebrated golden rule of justice was already enunciated by Greek moralists in the fourth century B.C. Possibly it may have been first formulated by Socrates. In all cases it occurs in the writings of his disciple, Plato, and of Isocrates whom Plato numbers among his disciples; and it happily expresses the drift of his entire philosophy. This generalising tendency was, indeed, so natural to a noble Greek, that instances of it occur long before philosophy began. We find it in the famous question of Achilles: 'Did not this whole war begin on account of a woman? Are the Atreidae the only men who love their wives?'¹ and in the not less famous apostrophe to Lycaon, reminding him that an early death is the lot of far worthier men than he²—utterances which come on us with the awful effect of lightning flashes, that illuminate the whole horizon of existence while they paralyse or destroy an individual victim.

The power which Socrates possessed of rousing other minds to independent activity and apostolic transmission of spiritual gifts was, as I have said, the second verification of his doctrine. Even those who, like Antisthenes and Aristippus, derived their positive theories from the Sophists rather than from him, preferred to be regarded as his followers; and Plato, from whom his ideas received their most splendid development, has acknowledged the debt by making that venerated figure the centre of his own immortal Dialogues. A third verification is given by the subjective, practical, dialectic tendency of all subsequent philosophy properly so called. On this point it will suffice to quote one instance out of many, the declaration of Herbert Spencer that his whole system was constructed for the sake of its ethical conclusion.³

Apart, however, from abstract speculation, the ideal method seems to have exercised an immediate and powerful influence on Art, an influence which was anticipated by Socrates himself. In two conversations reported by Xenophon,⁴ he impresses on Parrhasius, the painter, and Cleito, the sculptor, the importance of so animating the faces and figures which they represented as to make them express human feelings, energies, and dispositions, particularly those of the most interesting and elevated type. And such, in fact, was the direction followed by imitative art after Pheidias, though not without degenerating into a sensationalism which Socrates would have severely condemned. Another and still more remarkable proof of the influence exercised on plastic representation by ideal philosophy was, perhaps, not foreseen

¹ *Il.*, ix., 337.

² In the preface to the *Data of Ethics*.

³ *Ib.*, xxi., 106.

⁴ *Mem.*, iii., 10.

by its founder. This was the substitution of abstract and generic for historical subjects by Greek sculpture in its later stages, and not by sculpture only, but by dramatic poetry as well. For early art, whether it addressed itself to the eye or to the imagination, and whether its subjects were taken from history or from fiction, had always been historical in this sense, that it exhibited the performance of particular actions by particular persons in a given place and at a given time; the mode of presentment most natural to those whose ideas are mainly determined by contiguous association. The schools which came after Socrates let fall the limitations of concrete reality, and found the unifying principle of their works in association by resemblance, making their figures the personification of a single attribute or group of attributes, and bringing together forms distinguished by the community of their characteristics or the convergence of their functions. Thus Aphrodité no longer figured as the lover of Arês or Anchisês, but as the personification of female beauty; while her statues were grouped together with images of the still more transparent abstractions, Love, Longing, Desire. Similarly Apollo became a personification of musical enthusiasm, and Dionysus of Bacchic inspiration. So also dramatic art, once completely historical, even with Aristophanes, now chose for its subjects such constantly-recurring types as the ardent lover, the stern father, the artful slave, the boastful soldier, and the fawning parasite.¹

Nor was this all. Thought, after having, as it would seem, wandered away from reality in search of empty abstractions, by the help of those very abstractions regained possession of concrete existence, and acquired a far fuller intelligence of its complex manifestations. For each individual character is an assemblage of qualities, and can only be understood when those qualities, after having been separately studied, are finally recombined. Thus, biography is a very late production of literature, and although biographies are the favourite reading of those who most despise philosophy, they could never have been written without its help. Moreover, before characters can be described they must exist. Now, it is partly philosophy which calls character into existence by sedulous inculcation of self-knowledge and self-culture, by consolidating a man's individuality into something independent of circumstances, so that it comes to form, not a figure in bas-relief, but what sculptors call a figure in the round. Such was Socrates himself, and such were the figures which he taught Xenophon and Plato to recognise and portray. Character-drawing begins with them,

¹ Curtius, *Griechische Geschichte*, iii., pp. 526-30 (3rd ed.), where, however, the revolution in art is attributed to the influence of the Sophists.

and the *Memorabilia* in particular is the earliest attempt at a biographical analysis that we possess. From this to Plutarch's *Lives* there was still a long journey to be accomplished, but the interval between them is less considerable than that which divides Xenophon from his immediate predecessor, Thucydides. And when we remember how intimately the substance of Christian teaching is connected with the literary form of its first record, we shall still better appreciate the all-penetrating influence of Hellenic thought, vying, as it does, with the forces of nature in subtlety and universal diffusion.

Besides transforming art and literature, the dialectic method helped to revolutionise social life, and the impulse communicated in this direction is still very far from being exhausted. I refer to its influence on female education. The intellectual blossoming of Athens was aided, in its first development, by a complete separation of the sexes. There were very few of his friends to whom an Athenian gentleman talked so little as to his wife.¹ Colonel Mure aptly compares her position to that of an English housekeeper, with considerably less liberty than is enjoyed by the latter. Yet the union of tender admiration with the need for intelligent sympathy and the desire to awaken interest in noble pursuits existed at Athens in full force, and created a field for its exercise. Wilhelm von Humboldt has observed that at this time chivalrous love was kept alive by customs which, to us, are intensely repellent. That so valuable a sentiment should be preserved and diverted into a more legitimate channel was an object of the highest importance. The naturalistic method of ethics did much, but it could not do all, for more was required than a return to primitive simplicity. Here the method of mind stepped in and supplied the deficiency. Reciprocity was the soul of dialectic as practised by Socrates, and the dialectic of love demands a reciprocity of passion which can only exist between the sexes. But in a society where the free intercourse of modern Europe was not permitted, the modern sentiment could not be reached at a single bound; and those who sought for the conversation of intelligent women had to seek for it among a class of which Aspasia was the highest representative. Such women played a great part in later Athenian society; they attended philosophical lectures, furnished heroines to the New Comedy, and on the whole gave a healthier tone to literature. Their successors, the Delias and Cynthias of Roman elegiac poetry, called forth strains of exalted affection which need nothing but a worthier object to place them on a level with the noblest expressions of tenderness that have since been heard. Here at least, to understand is to forgive; and we

¹ Xenoph., *Oeconom.*, iii., 12.

shall be less scandalised than certain critics,¹ we shall even refuse to admit that Socrates fell below the dignity of a moralist, when we hear that he once visited a celebrated beauty of this class, Theodotê by name;² that he engaged her in a playful conversation; and that he taught her to put more mind into her profession; to attract by something deeper than personal charms; to show at least an appearance of interest in the welfare of her lovers; and to stimulate their ardour by a studied reserve, granting no favour that had not been repeatedly and passionately sought after.

Xenophon gives the same interest a more edifying direction when he enlivens the dry details of his *Cyropaedia* with touching episodes of conjugal affection, or presents lessons in domestic economy under the form of conversations between a newly-married couple.³ Plato in some respects transcends, in others falls short of his less gifted contemporary. For his doctrine of love as an educating process—a true doctrine, all sneers and perversions notwithstanding—though readily applicable to the relation of the sexes, is not applied to it by him; and his project of a common training for men and women, though suggestive of a great advance on the existing system if rightly carried out, was, from his point of view, a retrograde step towards savage or even animal life, an attempt to throw half the burdens incident to a military organisation of society on those who had become absolutely incapable of bearing them.

Fortunately, the dialectic method proved stronger than its own creators, and, once set going, introduced feelings and experiences of which they had never dreamed within the horizon of philosophic consciousness. It was found that if women had much to learn, much also might be learned from them. Their wishes could not be taken into account without giving a greatly increased prominence in the guidance of conduct to such sentiments as fidelity, purity, and pity; and to that extent the religion which they helped to establish has, at least in principle, left no room for any further progress. On the other hand, it is only by reason that the more exclusively feminine impulses can be freed from their primitive narrowness and elevated into truly human emotions. Love, when left to itself, causes more pain than pleasure, for the words of the old idyl still remain true which associate it with jealousy as cruel as the grave⁴; pity, without prevision, creates more suffering than it relieves; and blind fidelity is instinctively opposed even to the most beneficent changes. We are still suffering from the excessive

¹ Mure, *History of Grecian Literature*, iv., p. 451.

² *Mem.*, iii., II.

³ *Oeconom.*, vii., 4 *sqq.*

⁴ That is, in the Alexandrian translation; in the Hebrew original there is nothing about jealousy.

preponderance which Catholicism gave to the ideas of women ; but we need not listen to those who tell us that the varied experiences of humanity cannot be organised into a rational, consistent, self-supporting whole.

A survey of the Socratic philosophy would be incomplete without some comment on an element in the life of Socrates, which at first sight seems to lie altogether outside philosophy. There is no fact in his history more certain than that he believed himself to be constantly accompanied by a *Daemonium*, a divine voice often restraining him, even in trifling matters, but never prompting to positive action. That it was neither conscience in our sense of the word, nor a supposed familiar spirit, is now generally admitted. Even those who believe in the supernatural origin and authority of our moral feelings do not credit them with a power of divining the accidentally good or evil consequences which may attend on our most trivial and indifferent actions ; while, on the other hand, those feelings have a positive no less than a negative function, which is exhibited whenever the performance of good deeds becomes a duty. That the *Daemonium* was not a personal attendant is proved by the invariable use of an indefinite neuter adjective to designate it. How the phenomenon itself should be explained is a question for professional pathologists. What has here to be accounted for is the interpretation put on it by Socrates, and this, in my judgment, follows quite naturally from his characteristic mode of thought. That the gods should signify their pleasure by visible signs and public oracles was an experience familiar to every Greek. Socrates, conceiving God as a mind diffused through the whole universe, would look for traces of the Divine presence in his own mind, and would readily interpret any inward suggestion, not otherwise to be accounted for, as a manifestation of this all-pervading power. Why it should invariably appear under the form of a restraint is less obvious. The only explanation seems to be that, as a matter of fact, such mysterious feelings, whether the product of unconscious experience or not, do habitually operate as deterrents rather than as incentives.

VII

This *Daemonium*, whatever it may have been, formed one of the ostensible grounds on which its possessor was prosecuted and condemned to death for impiety. We might have spared ourselves the trouble of going over the circumstances connected with that tragical event, had not various attempts been made in some well-known works to extenuate the significance of a singularly atrocious crime. The case stands thus. In the year

399 B.C. Socrates, who was then over seventy, and had never in his life been brought before a law-court, was indicted on the threefold charge of introducing new divinities, of denying those already recognised by the State, and of corrupting young men. His principal accuser was one Melétus, a poet, supported by Lycon, a rhetorician, and by a much more powerful backer, Anytus, a leading citizen in the restored democracy. The charge was tried before a large popular tribunal, numbering some five hundred members. Socrates regarded the whole affair with profound indifference. When urged to prepare a defence, he replied, with justice, that he had been preparing it his whole life long. He could not, indeed, have easily foreseen what line the prosecutors would take. Our own information on this point is meagre enough, being principally derived from references made by Xenophon, who was not himself present at the trial. There seems, however, no unfairness in concluding that the charge of irreligion neither was nor could be substantiated. The evidence of Xenophon is quite sufficient to establish the unimpeachable orthodoxy of his friend. If it really was an offence at Athens to believe in gods unrecognised by the State, Socrates was not guilty of that offence, for his *Daemonium* was not a new divinity, but a revelation from the established divinities, such as individual believers have at all times been permitted to receive even by the most jealous religious communities. The imputation of infidelity, commonly and indiscriminately brought against all philosophers, was a particularly unhappy one to fling at the great opponent of physical science, who, besides, was noted for the punctual discharge of his religious duties. That the first two counts of the indictment should be so frivolous raises a strong prejudice against the third. The charges of corruption seem to have come under two heads—alleged encouragement of disrespect to parents, and of disaffection towards democratic institutions. In support of the former some innocent expressions let fall by Socrates seem to have been taken up and cruelly perverted. By way of stimulating his young friends to improve their minds, he had observed that relations were only of value when they could help one another, and that to do so they must be properly educated. This was twisted into an assertion that ignorant parents might properly be placed under restraint by their better-informed children. That such an inference could not have been sanctioned by Socrates himself is obvious from his insisting on the respect due even to so intolerable a mother as Xanthippê.¹ The political opinions of the defendant presented a more vulnerable point for attack. He thought the custom of choosing magistrates by lot absurd, and did not conceal his

¹ *Mem.*, ii., 1.

contempt for it. There is, however, no reason for believing that such purely theoretical criticisms were forbidden by law or usage at Athens. At any rate, much more revolutionary sentiments were tolerated on the stage. That Socrates would be no party to a violent subversion of the Constitution, and would regard it with high disapproval, was abundantly clear both from his life and from the whole tenor of his teaching. In opposition to Hippias, he defined justice as obedience to the law of the land. The chances of the lot had, on one memorable occasion, called him to preside over the deliberations of the Sovereign Assembly. A proposition was made, contrary to law, that the generals who were accused of having abandoned the crews of their sunken ships at Arginusae should be tried in a single batch. In spite of tremendous popular clamour, Socrates refused to put the question to the vote on the single day for which his office lasted. The just and resolute man, who would not yield to the unrighteous demands of a crowd, had shortly afterwards to face the threats of a frowning tyrant. When the Thirty were installed in power, he publicly, and at the risk of his life, expressed disapproval of their sanguinary proceedings. The oligarchy, wishing to involve as many respectable citizens as possible in complicity with their crimes, sent for five persons, of whom Socrates was one, and ordered them to bring a certain Leo from Salamis, that he might be put to death; the others obeyed, but Socrates refused to accompany them on their disgraceful errand. Nevertheless, it told heavily against the philosopher that Alcibiades, the most mischievous of demagogues, and Critias, the most savage of aristocrats, passed for having been educated by him. It was remembered, also, that he was in the habit of quoting a passage from Homer, where Odysseus is described as appealing to the reason of the chiefs, while he brings inferior men to their senses with rough words and rougher chastisement. In reality, Socrates did not mean that the poor should be treated with brutality by the rich, for he would have been the first to suffer had such license been permitted, but he meant that where reason failed harsher methods of coercion must be applied. Precisely because expressions of opinion let fall in private conversation are so liable to be misunderstood or purposely perverted, to adduce them in support of a capital charge where no overt act can be alleged, is the most mischievous form of encroachment on individual liberty.

Modern critics, beginning with Hegel,¹ have discovered reasons for considering Socrates a dangerous character, which apparently did not occur to Melétus and his associates. We are told that the whole system of applying dialectics to morality had an unsettling tendency, for if men were once taught that

¹ *Gesch. d. Ph.*, vol. ii., p. 100 *sqq.*

the sacredness of duty rested on their individual conviction they might refuse to be convinced, and act accordingly. And it is further alleged that Socrates first introduced this principle of subjectivity into morals. The persecuting spirit is so insatiable that in default of acts it attacks opinions, and in default of specific opinions it fastens on general tendencies. We know that Joseph de Maistre was suspected by his ignorant neighbours of being a Revolutionist because most of his time was spent in study ; and a French Dominican preacher of the last generation, Father Didon, was sent into exile by his ecclesiastical superiors, as was supposed, for daring to support Catholic morality on rational grounds. Fortunately Greek society was not subject to the rules of the Dominican Order. Never anywhere in Greece, certainly not at Athens, did there exist that solid, all-comprehensive, unquestionable fabric of traditional obligation assumed by Hegel ; and Zeller is conceding far too much when he defends Socrates, on the sole ground that the recognised standards of right had fallen into universal contempt during the Peloponnesian war, while admitting that he might fairly have been silenced at an earlier period, if indeed his teaching could have been conceived as possible before it actually began.¹ For from the first, both in literature and in life, Greek thought is distinguished by an ardent desire to get to the bottom of every question, and to discover arguments of universal applicability for every decision. Even in the youth of Pericles knotty ethical problems were eagerly discussed without any interference on the part of the public authorities.² Experience had to prove how far-reaching was the effect of ideas before a systematic attempt could be made to control them.

In what terms Socrates replied to his accusers cannot be stated with absolute certainty. Reasons have been already given for believing that the speech put into his mouth by Plato is not entirely historical ; and here I may mention as a further reason that the specific charges mentioned by Xenophon are not even alluded to in it. Thus much, however, is clear, that the defence was of a thoroughly dignified character ; and that, while the allegations of the prosecution were successfully rebutted, the defendant stood entirely on his innocence, and refused to make any of the customary but illegal appeals to the compassion of the court. We are assured that he was condemned solely on account of this defiant attitude, and by a very small majority. Melétus had demanded the penalty of death, but by Attic law Socrates had the right of proposing some milder sentence as an alternative. According to Plato, he began by stating that the justest return for his entire devotion to the public good would

¹ *Ph. d. Gr.*, ii., 2, p. 228 (4th ed.).

² *Xenoph., Mem.*, i., 2, 46.

be maintenance at the public expense during the remainder of his life, an honour usually granted to victors at the Olympic games. In default of this he proposed a fine of thirty minae, to be raised by contributions among his friends. According to another account,¹ he refused, on the ground of his innocence, to name any alternative penalty. On a second division Socrates was condemned to death by a much larger majority than that which had found him guilty, eighty of those who had voted for his acquittal now voting for his execution.

Such was the transaction which some moderns, Grote among the number, holding Socrates to be one of the best and wisest of men, have endeavoured to excuse. Their argument is that the illustrious victim was jointly responsible for his own fate, and that he was really condemned, not for his teaching, but for contempt of court. In my opinion, this is a distinction without a difference. What Reid so finely said of space and time may be said also of the Socratic life and the Socratic doctrine; each was contained entire in every point of the other. Such as he appeared to the Dicastery, such also he appeared everywhere, always, and to all men, offering them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If conduct like his was not permissible in a court of law, then it was not permissible at all; if justice could not be administered without reticences, evasions, and disguises, where was sincerity ever to be practised? If reason was not to be the paramount arbitress in questions of public interest, what issues could ever be entrusted to her decision? Admit every extenuating circumstance that the utmost ingenuity can devise, and from every point of view one fact will come out clearly, that Socrates was impeached as a philosopher, that he defended himself like a philosopher, and that he was condemned to death because he was a philosopher. Those who attempt to remove this stain from the character of the Athenian people will find that, like the blood-stain on Blue-beard's key, when it is rubbed out on one side it reappears on the other. To punish Socrates for his teaching, or for the way in which he defended his teaching, was equally persecution, and persecution of the worst description, that which attacks not the results of free thought but free thought itself. I cannot then agree with Grote when he says that the condemnation of Socrates 'ought to count as one of the least gloomy items in an essentially gloomy catalogue.' On the contrary, it is the gloomiest of all, because it reveals a depth of hatred for pure reason in vulgar minds which might otherwise have remained unsuspected. There is some excuse for other persecutors, for Caiaphas, and St. Dominic, and Calvin: for the Inquisition, and for the authors of the dragonnades; for the judges of Giordano

¹ In the *Apologia* attributed to Xenophon (23).

Bruno, and the judges of Vanini : they were striving to exterminate particular opinions, which they believed to be both false and pernicious ; there is no such excuse for the Athenian dicasts, least of all for those eighty who, having pronounced Socrates innocent, sentenced him to death because he reasserted his innocence ; if, indeed, innocence be not too weak a word to describe his life-long battle against that very irreligion and corruption which were laid to his charge. Here, in this one cause, the great central issue between two abstract principles, the principle of authority and the principle of reason, was cleared from all adventitious circumstances, and disputed on its own intrinsic merits with the usual weapons of argument on the one side and brute force on the other. On that issue Socrates was finally condemned, and on it his judges must be condemned by us.

Neither can Grote's further contention be admitted that in no Greek city but Athens would Socrates have been permitted to carry on his cross-examining activity for so long a period. On the contrary, I agree with Colonel Mure,¹ that in no other state would he have been molested. Xenophanes and Parmenides, Heracleitus and Democritus, had given utterance to far bolder opinions than his, opinions radically destructive of Greek religion, apparently without running the slightest personal risk ; while Athens had more than once before shown the same spirit of fanatical intolerance, in the prosecutions of Anaxagoras the rationalist, Protagoras the agnostic, and Diagoras the atheist, as afterwards in the prosecution of Aristotle the pure theist, though without proceeding to such a fatal extreme, thanks, probably, to the timely escape of her intended victims. Ernest Renan contrasts the freedom of thought accorded by Roman despotism with the narrowness of old Greek Republicanism, quoting what he calls the Athenian Inquisition as a sample of the latter.² The word inquisition is not too strong, only the writer should not have led his readers to believe that Greek Republicanism was in this respect fairly represented by its most brilliant type, for had such been the case very little free thought would have been left for Rome to tolerate.

During the month's respite accidentally allowed him, Socrates had one more opportunity of displaying that steadfast obedience to the law which had been one of his great guiding principles through life. The means of escaping from prison were offered to him, but he refused to avail himself of them, according to Plato, that the implicit contract of loyalty to which his citizenship had bound him might be preserved unbroken. Nor was death unwelcome to him, although it may not be true that he

¹ *Hist. of Gr. Lit.*, vol. iv., App. A.

² *Les Apôtres*, pp. 314-315 (1st ed.).

courted it.¹ If he did court it the desire to figure as a martyr had no share in his suit, such an ambition being quite alien from the noble simplicity of his character. But he had reached an age when the daily growth in wisdom which for him alone made life worth living seemed likely to be exchanged for a gradual and melancholy decline. That this past progress was a good in itself he never doubted, whether it was to be continued in other worlds, or succeeded by the happiness of an eternal sleep. And we may be sure that he would have held his own highest good to be equally desirable for the whole human race, even with the clear prevision that its collective aspirations and efforts cannot be prolonged for ever.

Two philosophers only can be named who, in modern times, have rivalled or approached the moral dignity of Socrates. Like him, Spinoza realised his own ideal of a good and happy life. Like him, Giordano Bruno, without a hope of future recompense, chose death rather than a life unfaithful to the highest truth, and death, too, under its most terrible form, not the painless extinction by hemlock inflicted in a heathen city, but the agonising dissolution intended by Catholic love to serve as a foretaste of everlasting fire. Yet with neither can the parallel be extended further; for Spinoza, wisely perhaps, refused to face the storms which a public profession and propagation of his doctrine would have raised; and the wayward career of Giordano Bruno was not in keeping with its heroic close. The complex and distracting conditions in which their lot was cast did not permit them to attain that statuesque completeness which marked the classic age of Greek life and thought. Those times developed a wilder energy, a more stubborn endurance, a sweeter purity than any that the ancient world had known. But until the scattered elements are recombined in a still loftier harmony, our sleepless thirst for perfection can be satisfied at one spring alone. Pericles must remain the ideal of statesmanship, Pheidias of artistic production, and Socrates of philosophic power.

Before the ideas which we have passed in review could go forth on their world-conquering mission, it was necessary, not only that Socrates should die, but that his philosophy should die also, by being absorbed into the more splendid generalisations of Plato's system. That system has, for some time past, been made an object of close study in our most famous seats of learning, and a certain acquaintance with it has almost become part of a liberal education in England. No better source of inspiration, combined with discipline, could be found; but we shall understand and appreciate Plato still better by first extricating the nucleus round which his speculations have

¹ As is stated in the Xenophontic *Apologia*.

gathered in successive deposits, and this we can only do with the help of Xenophon, whose little work also well deserves attention for the sake of its own chaste and candid beauty. The relation in which it stands to the Platonic writings may be symbolised by an example familiar to the experience of every traveller. As sometimes, in visiting a Gothic cathedral, we are led through the wonders of the more modern edifice—under soaring arches, over tessellated pavements, and between long rows of clustered columns, past frescoed walls, storied windows, carven pulpits, and sepulchral monuments, with their endless wealth of mythologic imagery—down into the oldest portion of all, the bare stern crypt, severe with the simplicity of early art, resting on pillars taken from an ancient temple, and enclosing the tomb of some martyred saint, to whose glorified spirit an office of perpetual intercession before the mercy-seat is assigned, and in whose honour all that external magnificence has been piled up; so also we pass through the manifold and marvellous constructions of Plato's imagination to that austere memorial where Xenophon has enshrined with pious care, under the great primary divisions of old Hellenic virtue, an authentic reliquary of one standing foremost among those who, having worked out their own deliverance from the powers of error and evil, 'would not be saved *alone*,'¹ but published the secret of redemption though death were the penalty of its disclosure; and who, by their transmitted influence, even more than by their eternal example, are still contributing to the progressive development of all that is most rational, most consistent, most social, and therefore most truly human in ourselves.

NOTE ON CHAPTER IV

The foregoing study on the life teaching and death of Socrates first appeared as an article in the *Westminster Review* for April, 1880. The subject is one to which I have constantly recurred in the intervening years; but on going over it once more for a final revision I have found no reason to make any essential alteration in the judgments expressed a generation ago. As regards the trial and condemnation of Socrates my view has been confirmed by two authorities of the highest eminence, Prof. Julius Beloch and Prof. Ed. Meyer. Beloch—himself no believer in theology—credits Socrates with the first attempt ever made to reconcile knowledge with faith, and points out that he 'fell a victim to the reactionary tendencies of the age which he had himself done so much to promote.'² Ed. Meyer is of opinion that, as against the rationalistic Sophists and Euripides, Socrates had a pious belief in the gods of the people, and in a providential government of the world; 'his condemnation has lived in the memory of mankind for

¹ The sublime expression used by Matthew Arnold of his father in *Rugby Chapel*.

² *Griechische Gesch.*, vol. ii., p. 17.

thousands of years as the greatest crime in Athenian history' (*Gesch. d. Alterth.*, vol. iv., p. 451 ; vol. v., p. 227).

Prof. Bury differs widely from his two fellow-historians. Speaking of the trial he says: 'The actual reply of Socrates has not been preserved, but we know its tone and spirit and much of its tenor. For it supplied his companion Plato, who was present, with the material of a work which stands absolutely alone in literature. In the *Apology of Socrates* Plato has succeeded in catching the personality of the master and conveying its stimulus to his readers. There can be no question that this work reproduces the general outline of the actual defence, which is here brought into an artistic form. And we see how utterly impossible it was for Socrates to answer the accusation. He enters into an explanation of his life and motives, and has no difficulty in showing that many things popularly alleged against him are false. But with the actual charge of holding and diffusing heterodox views he deals briefly and unsatisfactorily. He was not condemned unjustly—according to law. And that is the intensity of the tragedy. There have been no better men than Socrates ; and yet his accusers were perfectly right' (*History of Greece*, pp. 580–581). I must confess to a feeling of utter amazement at the extreme dogmatism of this judgment, coming as it does from a scholar of such ability and learning as Prof. Bury. He must know that the historical accuracy of Plato's *Apology* has been impugned on the strength of arguments that have not been answered. One might with as much reason affirm the general fidelity of the speeches in Thucydides, or in the Synoptic Gospels, or in Acts. Indeed, we have much stronger grounds for questioning what Plato tells us about his master ; for we know on incontrovertible evidence what liberties he took with the master's teaching in his other writings. Prof. Bury himself believes that 'Thucydides must have been one of the audience' that listened to the Funeral Oration of Pericles ; yet he only 'fancies we can detect some phrases that actually fell from the lips of Pericles himself' on that occasion. And besides our knowledge of Plato's literary methods as elsewhere exhibited, there is the direct counter-evidence of the Xenophontic *Apology*, 'the general outline' of which differs widely from Plato's, and is far more convincing. Xenophon was not, indeed, present at the trial ; but he is likely to have sought and obtained authentic information from eye-witnesses of the scene. Anyhow what he tells us on hearsay is quite enough to dispose of Prof. Bury's assertion about the 'impossibility of answering the accusation.' For it is answered, and very satisfactorily too, by the appeal of Socrates to the well-known punctuality and zeal with which he discharged his religious duties—of which besides we have the unimpeachable evidence of the *Memorabilia*. I say unimpeachable, for such a ritualist as Xenophon had no assignable motive for testifying to his master's orthodoxy had not long experience convinced him of its genuineness.

Prof. Gilbert Murray has some interesting pages on Socrates and his accusers in his *Ancient Greek Literature*, where, however, the religious question is left out of sight and the Platonic *Apology* frankly put down as 'of course a fiction.' On the other hand, we get some details—more picturesque, I fear, than authentic, about Anytus and his son. 'He [the father] had had relations with Socrates before. He was a tanner, a plain well-to-do tradesman, himself ; but he had set his heart on the future of his only son, and was prepared to make for that object any sacrifice except that which was asked. The son wished to follow Socrates. He herded with young aristocrats of doubtful principles and suspected loyalty ; he refused to go into his father's business. Socrates, not tactfully, had pleaded his cause. Had Socrates had his way, or Anytus his, all might have been well. As it was, the young man was left rebellious and hankering ; when his father became an outlaw for freedom's sake he stayed in the city with Socrates and the tyrants ; he became ultimately a hopeless drunkard.' And

Prof. Murray describes how 'the old tradesman as he fought his way back to Athens thought of the satyr-faced sophist discussing ambiguous subjects with his ruined son' (*op. cit.*, pp. 176-177).

Prof. Murray quotes no authorities for his statement, and after a good deal of searching I can find none but the Xenophontic *Apology*. It is hard to prove a negative; but I think I may say that beyond this there is not a tittle of contemporary evidence for the story. Even granting its authenticity and accuracy, the account attributed to Xenophon differs widely from Prof. Murray's version. According to the Greek author as Socrates was leaving the Court he passed Anytus and observed that this triumphant accuser of his was actuated by motives of personal spite. 'For,' he explained, 'seeing that the State had bestowed on him the highest honours I said he ought not to be bringing up his son to the business of a tanner. And now as, according to Homer, some of those about to die have a foreknowledge of the future, I too will make a prophecy. Some slight acquaintance with the son of Anytus gave me not a bad opinion of his abilities, and I am sure that he will not continue in the servile occupation to which his father has trained him. As a result of having no proper guardian to look after him the young man will become addicted to some disgraceful appetite and go far in vicious courses.' And in this prognostication, we are told, 'Socrates was not mistaken; for the son of Anytus conceived a passion for wine and never stopped drinking day or night, and so became at last utterly unserviceable to the community, his friends, and himself. As for Anytus, the bad education that he gave his son, and his own folly covered him with a discredit which still continues even now that he is dead' (*Apol.*, 29-32).

Prof. Döring, a Socratic expert of high authority, summarily rejects the whole story. But, true or false, no historian, however eminent in literature or scholarship, has a right to add to, alter, or transpose the original statements without reason given. Now Prof. Murray clearly gives it to be understood that the young man came to ruin *before* the restoration of the democracy, whereas Xenophon (or his imitator) places the catastrophe some years later, *i.e.* after the death of Socrates. There is no evidence that Anytus 'was prepared to make any sacrifice,' except one, for his son's future—or indeed any sacrifice at all; none that the youth 'wished to follow Socrates,' or that he 'refused to follow his father's business,' or that he 'herded with young aristocrats of doubtful principles or suspected loyalty,' or that he 'discussed ambiguous subjects'—or indeed any subjects—with Socrates under the Thirty, or even that he stayed in the city at all while his father was at Phylê. Taking the evidence as it stands—and we have no right whatever to go outside it—Anytus did not venture to say that his son had been corrupted, directly or indirectly, through the influence of Socrates, or he would certainly have made it a part of his case in bringing the action. But clearly he did not do this, or Socrates would not have taunted his accuser with it after the trial as a discreditable incident accounting for his vindictiveness.

While on the subject of Anytus I may as well say something about an alleged instance of magnanimity with which he has been credited by his modern admirers. During his exile his property (which was considerable) had been confiscated, and appropriated by some of the opposite party. After his reinstatement and return to power 'he left them undisturbed in enjoyment of it,' as Prof. Murray says, mentioning this as a meritorious circumstance (p. 176); as also does Prof. A. E. Taylor, who tells us that 'Anytus in particular distinguished himself by setting the example of renouncing all demands for compensation for the loss of a considerable fortune' (*Varia Socratica*, p. 2). Now Anytus could only have obtained 'compensation' by bringing a suit for restitution against the persons who were detaining his property. But this he was barred from attempting by a general amnesty, one of whose authors he was. And in the very passage

quoted from Isocrates in evidence the expression used is that the democratic leader did not *dare* to take such proceedings (xviii. 23). As Jebb put it in his summary of the speech composed by Isocrates, 'the Amnesty, a compact solemnly sworn to . . . deters your most influential citizens, Thrasybulos and Anytus, from claiming great sums of which they were robbed from those whom they know to be answerable' (*Attic Orators*, vol. ii., pp. 234-5). As regards political virtue Anytus was not above suspicion. After failing to relieve the Athenian garrison at Pylos (possibly through no fault of his own) he was accused of treason before the Dicastery, and according to the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens*, only escaped condemnation by bribing the jurors—conduct of which he was the first to be guilty (*Politeia*, 27).

Quite recently Prof. A. E. Taylor has brought forward an entirely new view of Socrates and his teaching, going to show that 'Socrates was, according to law, actually guilty of the charge' on which he was condemned to death. He 'suggests that one chief reason for the prosecution was that he was suspected of having been the centre of an anti-democratic *ἐραπεία*, and that the suspicion was supported by the belief that he was addicted to the "foreign" cult of the Pythagoreans' (*Varia Socratica*, p. 30). I do not agree with this view. The considerations on which it is based seem to me unwarrantable. One of these is that Plato's Dialogues are on the whole a faithful representation of his master's teaching. Now, if this is not true of the *Apology*, it is still more unlikely to be true of any other Platonic work; and it seems to me that the fictitious character of the *Apology* has been sufficiently demonstrated—most tellingly in my opinion by Prof. Robert v. Pöhlmann (*Das Sokratesproblem*, in *Alterthum u. Gegenwart*, *Neue Folge*, pp. 1-117). Besides there is Aristotle's testimony to the fact that Socrates (unlike Plato) did not separate the ideas from their concrete presentation. One of the arguments for the Athenian philosopher's Pythagoreanism is that he believed in the doctrine of immortality. But without accepting the *Apology* as the real defence offered by him, it is good evidence to the contrary and is generally accepted as such. For Plato had nothing to gain by foisting on his master a sceptical attitude which either was not his own, or if it was his own had been learned from Socrates. But Prof. Taylor denies the scepticism of the address to the Court. According to him to speak of it as sceptical is 'simply giving a false account of the facts' (p. 31). Admitting that Socrates, in order to show that on no alternative can death be an evil, argues that even eternal sleep would be a desirable consummation, still 'it requires a singularly dull and tasteless reader not to see that his own sympathies are with the hope of a blessed immortality' (ib.). Prof. Taylor is too well-read not to be aware that the view he calls 'simply false' is the one held by such scholars as Zeller, Gomperz, Rohde, and Prof. Bury; and it argues a singular deficiency in Attic moderation and urbanity to fling such epithets as 'dull' and 'tasteless' at them, and at those who share their point of view. Moreover, Prof. Taylor seems to forget that Plato in the *Phaedo* makes Simmias and Cebes rather sceptical about 'the hope of a blessed immortality,' so that their companionship with Socrates—Pythagoreans though they were—cannot be brought as a proof of his being a Pythagorean of the old school to the extent of believing, like Pythagoras himself, in immortal life. That Socrates attached no more practical importance to the belief in a future life than the average Athenian seems to be made highly probable by the silence of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*; and the force of this presumption is increased by the fact that his ideal king is made argue for it in the *Cyropaedia*. For Xenophon had no reason for making Cyrus rather than Socrates his mouth-piece, except that his old master was notoriously either a sceptic or a complete unbeliever on the subject.¹

¹ For a complete refutation of the theory that Socrates was a Pythagorean, see Mr. A. S. Ferguson's article in the *Classical Quarterly*, No. 3, July, 1913, pp. 157 sqq.

Prof. Robert v. Pöhlmann in his essay on the Socratic question (*op. cit.*) takes a view of the great dialectician in some ways the reverse of Prof. Taylor's. According to him it is not the mystical but the rationalistic side of his master's teaching, that Xenophon has covered up. The argument seems to be on the whole that Socrates was much too clever and critical to believe in the gods worshipped at Athens. Much the same sort of presumption might be used to show that Dr. Johnson was a deist. In fact Charles Greville has suggested that we are far too ready to take Boswell's word for the sage's orthodoxy. But Xenophon had more brains than Boswell; and although he may have overestimated his master's credulity and put an undue amount of pietistic twaddle to his account, I continue to think that on the whole the picture in the *Memorabilia* may be accepted as a candid and trustworthy portrait.

CHAPTER V

PLATO : HIS TEACHERS AND HIS TIMES

I

THE personality of Socrates, the story of his life and death, exercised an immediate and lasting influence on philosophy. Redeemed from the bankruptcy of physical speculation, freed from the equivocal associations of Sophisticism, it tended henceforward to become the central interest of the Hellenic mind under the form that it had received from the great organising representative of Athenian life and thought. Schools sprang up on all sides embodying the most divergent tendencies, but always claiming to continue the Socratic tradition. And in fact what constituted a Socratist was neither a set of opinions nor a particular mode of life, but the intimate connexion of practice with principle, the determination to set up a standard of perfection and to realise it in conduct. It was just this self-consistency that had distinguished Socrates from the Sophists. Prodicus preached submission to hardships, but he seems to have been personally a Sybarite. Hippias preached the return to nature, while his appearance and pursuits bore the stamp of a refined and complicated civilisation. Antisthenes inherited their physiocratic system and made nature as against convention the watchword of the Cynic school which he founded ; but in the severe simplicity, the renunciation of luxury, the self-restriction to the bare necessities of life that he practised and enforced on his disciples, Socrates was his avowed and only model. Aristippus adopted the sceptical subjectivity of Protagoras and worked it up into a more systematic form of agnosticism, severing the individual from the world, and giving him for an object in life the cultivation of his most agreeable sensations ; but his steady pursuit of this ideal, the perfect adaptability that made him the master of circumstances where other men remained their slaves, enabled him also to count as a disciple of the very Socrates by whom his cosmopolitan hedonism had been most severely condemned. Eucleides, an Eleatic dialectician, gave the absolute One of his masters a Socratic colouring by identifying it with the Good.¹

¹ For Prodicus see Plato, *Protagoras*, 315 D ; Hippias, Plato, *Hippias Minor*, 368 A ; Antisthenes, Laert. Diog. vi. 2 ; Aristippus, *ib.* ii. 8, Xenoph. *Mem.* ii. 1 ; Eucleides, Laert. Diog. ii. 10.

The two last-mentioned thinkers were Dorians; Antisthenes was the son of a Thracian mother by an Athenian father. To complete the Athenian philosophy and to develop its capabilities to their utmost possible extent there was needed an Athenian of the purest race and one who should represent the nobility of Athens in its spiritual form as perfectly as Socrates had represented the spiritual form, the pure essence of its Demos. Such a successor was found in one high-born youth, who, we may be sure, would have become great anywhere or in any circumstances, but who needed the sunlike stimulation of the unequalled dialectical master to become, what he is for us, the greatest thinker and writer of all time.

Plato (427-347) was descended through his father from Codrus, while through his mother's family he claimed kindred with Solon. He was also related on the maternal side to Critias, the head of the oligarchical party, and to Charmides, one of its brightest ornaments. At the time when they, along with others of the same faction, rose to supreme power and used it in such a manner as to sink their whole party in irretrievable ruin he was still too young to share either in their brief exaltation or in their headlong fall; and the influence of Socrates, under which he had come at a still earlier period, served to alienate him permanently from practical politics in his native city; though not from the study of her practical interests in the highest sense of the word.

Plato responded with every fibre of his ardent and susceptible nature to the Socratic teaching. Religious belief was not fashionable in the society to which he belonged, and was indeed expressly repudiated by his kinsman Critias, who seems to have been in this respect a Protagorean. But, as we have seen, a religious reaction was gaining ground towards the close of the century, and Plato threw himself into it with characteristic fervour. Even before the end of the Peloponnesian War symptoms of a reaction against Greek humanism and naturalism were appearing, and the *Bacchae* of Euripides bears striking testimony to its gloomy and fanatical character. The last agony of Athens, the collapse of her power, and the subsequent period of oligarchic terrorism, must have given a stimulus to superstition like that which, after the German War and the Commune afflicted France with an epidemic of apparitions and pilgrimages almost too childish for belief. Plato followed the general movement, although on a much higher plane. While looking down with undisguised contempt on the immoral idolatry of his countrymen, he was equally opposed to the irreligion of the New Learning, and, had an opportunity been given him, he would, like the Reformers of the sixteenth century, have put down both with impartial severity. Nor was this the only

analogy between his position and that of a Luther or a Calvin. Like them, and indeed like all great religious teachers, he exalted the Creator by enlarging on the nothingness of the creature; just as Christianity exhibits the holiness of God in contrast and correlation with the sinfulness of unregenerate hearts; just as to Pindar man's life seemed but the fleeting shadow in a dream when compared with the beauty and strength and immortality of the Olympian divinities; so also did Plato deepen the gloom of human ignorance that he might bring out in dazzling relief the fulness of that knowledge which he had been taught to prize as a supreme ideal, but which, for that very reason, seemed proper to the highest existences alone. And we shall presently see how Plato also discovered a principle in man by virtue of which he claimed kindred with the supernatural, and elaborated a scheme of intellectual mediation by which the fallen spirit could be regenerated and made a partaker in the kingdom of speculative truth.

Yet if Plato's theology, from its predominantly rationalistic character, seemed to neglect some feelings which were better satisfied by the earlier or the later faiths of mankind, we cannot say that it really excluded them. The unfading strength of the old gods was comprehended in the self-existence of absolute ideas, and moral goodness was only a particular application of reason to the conduct of life. An emotional or imaginative element was also contributed by the theory that every faculty exercised without a reasoned consciousness of its processes and aims was due to some saving grace and inspiration from a superhuman power. It was thus, according to Plato, that poets and artists were able to produce works of which they were not able to render an intelligent account; and it was thus that society continued to hold together with such an exceedingly small amount of wisdom and virtue. Here, however, we have to observe a marked difference between the religious teachers pure and simple, and the Greek philosopher who was a dialectician even more than he was a divine. For Plato held that providential government was merely provisional; that the inspired prophet stood on a distinctly lower level than the critical, self-conscious thinker; that ratiocination and not poetry was the highest function of mind; and that action should be reorganised in accordance with demonstrably certain principles.¹

Socrates was a religious nature; but apart from the *Apologia* there is no evidence to prove that the confession of human nescience formed an element of his religion; and reasons have been offered for believing the *Apologia* to be a romance. At the same time it seems likely enough that the first part of his new educational method consisted in making a clean sweep of

¹ See Zeller's note on the *θελα μοίπα*, *Ph. d. Gr.* vol. ii., p. 594 (4th ed.).

the learner's preconceived ideas, of the notions he had picked up from common opinion, or from the unfounded conceit of his own superior wisdom; and that this method extended itself into a general criticism of the current cosmologies together with the inchoate ethical systems whether based on Nature or on Law. Plato himself, who had been a Heracleitean before he came under the Socratic influence, would not be the last disciple to make acquaintance with the wholesome discipline of the cross-examining elenchus; and the experiences of confusion and shame so vividly described by him in the fictitious character of Alcibiades are in all probability a reminiscence of those early lessons. But the result was not wholly negative; it had been obtained by the operation of reason, involving the assumption that things are consistent with themselves, that truth and right are secured—as Heracleitus also would have insisted—by the divine Logos, by the dominance of articulated thought over the impulses of passion and the delusions of sense.

To assert, extend, and organise this dominance, this supremacy, was the object of Plato's whole life. Such, indeed, had been the object of all his predecessors, and such, stated generally, has been always and everywhere the object of philosophy; but none had pursued it so consciously before, and none has proclaimed it so enthusiastically since then. Now, although Plato could not have done this without a far wider range of knowledge and experience than Socrates had possessed, it was only by virtue of the Socratic method that his other gifts and acquisitions could be turned to complete account; while, conversely, it was only when brought to bear upon these new materials that the full power of the method itself could be revealed. To be continually asking and answering questions; to elicit information from everybody on every subject worth knowing; and to elaborate the resulting mass of intellectual material into the most convenient form for practical application or for further transmission, was the secret of true wisdom with the sage of the market-place and the workshop. But the process of dialectic investigation as an end in itself, the intense personal interest of conversation with living men and women of all classes, the impatience for immediate and visible results, had gradually induced Socrates to restrict within far too narrow limits the sources whence his ideas were derived and the purposes to which they were applied. And the dialectic method itself could not but be checked in its internal development by this want of breadth and variety in the topics submitted to its grasp. Therefore the death of Socrates, however lamentable in its occasion, was an unmixed benefit to the cause for which he laboured, by arresting (as we must suppose it to have arrested) the popular and indiscriminate employment of his cross-examining method,

liberating his ablest disciple from the ascendancy of a revered master, and inducing him to reconsider the whole question of human knowledge and action from a remoter point of view. For, be it observed that Plato did not begin where Socrates had left off; he went back to the germinal point of the whole system, and proceeded to reconstruct it on new lines of his own. The loss of those whom we love habitually leads our thoughts back to the time of our first acquaintance with them, or, if these are ascertainable, to the circumstances of their early life. In this manner Plato seems to have been at first occupied exclusively with the starting-point of his friend's philosophy, and we know, from the narrative given in the *Apologia*, under what form he came to conceive it. The account referred to as it stands is unhistorical. Nevertheless it seems sufficiently clear that Socrates began with a conviction of his own ignorance, and that his efforts to improve others were prefaced by the extraction of a similar confession of ignorance on their part. It is also certain that through life he regarded the causes of physical phenomena as placed beyond the reach of human reason and reserved by the gods for their own exclusive cognisance, pointing, by way of proof, to the notorious differences of opinion prevalent among those who had meddled with such matters. Thus, his scepticism worked in two directions, but on the one side it was only provisional and on the other it was only partial. Plato began by combining the two. He maintained that human nescience is universal and necessary; that the gods had reserved all knowledge for themselves; and that the only wisdom left for men is a consciousness of their absolute ignorance. The Socratic starting-point gave the centre of his agnostic circle; the Socratic theology gave the distance at which it was described.

II

The search after a logical basis for conduct was quite in the spirit of Socrates, but Plato seems to have set very little value on his master's positive contributions to the systematisation of life. We have seen that the *Apologia* is purely sceptical in its tendency; and we find a whole group of dialogues, probably the earliest of Plato's compositions, marked by the same negative, inconclusive tone. These are commonly spoken of as Socratic, and so no doubt they are in reference to the subjects discussed; but they would be more accurately described as an attempt to turn the Socratic method against its first originator. We know from Xenophon that temperance, fortitude, and piety were the chief virtues inculcated and practised by Socrates; while friendship, if not strictly speaking a virtue, was equally with them one of his prime interests in life. It

is clear that he considered them the most appropriate and remunerative subjects of philosophical discussion ; that he could define their nature to his own satisfaction ; and that he had, in fact, defined them as so many varieties of wisdom. Now, Plato has devoted a separate dialogue to each of the conceptions in question,¹ and in each instance he represents Socrates, who is the principal spokesman, as professedly ignorant of the whole subject under discussion, offering no definition of his own (or at least none that he will stand by), but asking his interlocutors for theirs, and pulling it to pieces when it is given. We do, indeed, find a tendency to resolve the virtues into knowledge, and, so far, either to identify them with one another, or to carry them up into the unity of a higher idea. To this extent Plato follows in the footsteps of his master, but a result which had completely satisfied Socrates became the starting-point of a new investigation with his successor. If virtue is knowledge, it must be knowledge of what we most desire—of the good. Thus the original difficulty returns under another form, or rather we have merely restated it in different terms. For, to ask what is temperance or fortitude, is equivalent to asking what is its use. And this was so obvious to Socrates, that, apparently, he never thought of distinguishing between the two questions. But no sooner were they distinguished than his reduction of all morality to a single principle was shown to be illusory. For each specific virtue had been substituted the knowledge of a specific utility, and that was all.

We may also suspect that Plato was dissatisfied not only with the positive results obtained by Socrates, but also with the Socratic method of constructing general definitions. To rise from the part to the whole, from particular instances to general notions, was a popular rather than a scientific process ; and sometimes it only amounted to taking the current explanations and modifying them to suit the exigencies of ordinary experience. The resulting definitions could never be more than tentative, and a skilful dialectician could always upset them by producing an unlooked-for exception, or by discovering an ambiguity in the terms by which they were conveyed.

Before ascertaining in what direction Plato sought for an outlet from these accumulated difficulties, we have to glance at a dialogue belonging apparently to his earliest compositions, but in one respect occupying a position apart from the rest. The *Crito* tells us for what reasons Socrates refused to escape from the fate which awaited him in prison, as, with the assistance of generous friends, he might easily have done. The aged philosopher considered that by adopting such a course he would be setting the Athenian laws at defiance, and doing what in him

¹ The *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, and *Lysis*.

lay to destroy their validity. Now, we know that the historical Socrates held justice to consist in obedience to the law of the land; and here for once we find Plato agreeing with him on a definite and positive issue. Such a sudden and singular abandonment of the sceptical attitude merits our attention. It might, indeed, be said that Plato's inconsistencies defy all attempts at reconciliation, and that in this instance the desire to set his maligned friend in a favourable light triumphed over the claims of an impracticable logic. It seems to me, however, that a deeper and truer solution can be found. If the *Crito* inculcates obedience to the laws as a binding obligation, it is not for the reasons which, according to Xenophon, were adduced by the real Socrates in his dispute with the Sophist Hippias; general utility and private interest were the sole grounds appealed to then. Plato, on the other hand, ignores all such external considerations. True to his usual method, he reduces the legal conscience to a purely dialectical process. Just as in an argument the disputants are, or ought to be, bound by their own admissions, so also the citizen is bound by a tacit compact to fulfil the laws whose protection he has enjoyed, and of whose claims his protracted residence is an acknowledgment. Here there is no need of a transcendent foundation for morality, as none but logical considerations come into play. And it also deserves to be noticed that, where this very idea of an obligation based on acceptance of services had been employed by Socrates, it was discarded by Plato. In the *Euthyphro*, a dialogue devoted to the discussion of piety, the theory that religion rests on an exchange of good offices between gods and men is mentioned only to be scornfully rejected. Equally remarkable, and equally in advance of the Socratic standpoint, is a principle enunciated in the *Crito*, that retaliation is wrong, and that evil should never be returned for evil¹—both distinct anticipations of the earliest Christian teaching.

If the earliest of Plato's enquiries, while they deal with the same subjects and are conducted on the same method as those cultivated by Socrates, evince a breadth of view surpassing anything recorded of him by Xenophon, they also exhibit traces of an influence disconnected with and inferior in value to his. On more than one occasion² Plato reasons, or rather quibbles, in a style which he has elsewhere held up to ridicule as characteristic of the Sophists, with such success that the name of sophistry has clung to it ever since. Indeed, some of the verbal fallacies employed are so transparent that we can hardly suppose them to be unintentional, and we are forced to conclude that the young despiser of human wisdom was resolved to maintain his thesis with any weapons, good or bad, that came to hand. And

¹ *Crito*, 49 A sqq.

² *Charmides*, 161 E; *Lysis*, 212 C.

it seems much more likely that he learned the 'eristic art from Protagoras or from his disciples than from Socrates.¹ Plato spent a large part of his life in opposing the Sophists—that is to say, the paid professors of wisdom and virtue; but in spite of, or rather perhaps because of, this very opposition, he was profoundly affected by their teaching and example. It is quite conceivable, although we do not find it stated as a fact, that he resorted to them for instruction when a young man and before coming under the influence of Socrates, an event which did not take place until he was twenty years old; or he may have been directed to them by Socrates himself. With all its originality, his style bears traces of a rhetorical training in the more elaborate passages, and the Sophists were the only teachers of rhetoric then to be found. His habit of clothing philosophical lessons in the form of a myth seems also to have been borrowed from them. It would, therefore, not be surprising that he should cultivate their argumentative legerdemain side by side with the more strict and severe discipline of Socratic dialectics.

Plato does, no doubt, make it a charge against some Sophists that their doctrines are not only false and immoral, but that they are put together without any regard for logical coherence. It would seem, however, that this style of attack belongs rather to the later and constructive than to the earlier and receptive period of his intellectual development. The original cause of his antagonism to the professional teachers seems to have been their general pretensions to knowledge, which, from the standpoint of universal scepticism, were, of course, utterly unfounded; together with a feeling of aristocratic contempt for a calling in which considerations of pecuniary interest were involved, heightened in this instance by a conviction that the buyer received nothing better than a sham article in exchange for his money. Here, again, a parallel suggests itself with the first preaching of the Gospel. The attitude of Jesus towards the scribes and Pharisees, as also that of St. Paul towards Simon Magus, will help us to understand how Plato, in another order of spiritual teaching, must have regarded the hypocrisy of wisdom, the intrusion of fraudulent traders into the temple of Delphic inspiration, and the sale of a priceless blessing whose unlimited diffusion should have been its own and only reward.

Yet throughout the philosophy of Plato we meet with a tendency to ambiguous shiftings and reversions of which, here also, due account must be taken. That curious blending of love and hate which forms the subject of a mystical lyric in Robert Browning's *Pippa Passes*, is not without its counterpart

¹ It has been denied by Henry Sidgwick that the eristic art was practised in any Sophistic school; but I am not aware that his view has been generally accepted. Anyhow it was practised by Plato.

in purely rationalistic discussion. If Plato used the Socratic method to dissolve away much that was untrue, because incomplete, in Socratism, he used it also to absorb much that was deserving of development in Sophisticism. If, in one sense, the latter was a direct reversal of his master's teaching, in another it served as a sort of intermediary between that teaching and the unenlightened consciousness of mankind. The shadow should not be confounded with the substance, but it might show by contiguity, by resemblance, and by contrast where the solid reality lay, what were its outlines, and how its characteristic lights might best be viewed.

Such is the mild and conciliatory mode of treatment at first adopted by Plato in dealing with the principal representative of the Sophists—Protagoras.¹ In the dialogue which bears his name the famous humanist is presented to us as a professor of popular unsystematised morality, proving by a variety of practical arguments and ingenious illustrations that virtue can be taught, and that the preservation of social order depends upon the possibility of teaching it; but unwilling to go along with the reasonings by which Socrates shows the applicability of rigorously scientific principles to conduct. Plato has here taken up one side of the Socratic ethics, and developed it into a complete and self-consistent theory. The doctrine inculcated is that form of utilitarianism to which Henry Sidgwick has given the name of egoistic hedonism. We are brought to admit that virtue is one because the various virtues reduce themselves in the last analysis to prudence. It is assumed that happiness, in the sense of pleasure and the absence of pain, is the sole end of life. Duty is identified with interest. Morality is a calculus for computing quantities of pleasure and pain, and all virtuous action is a means for securing a maximum of the one together with a minimum of the other. Ethical science is constituted; it can be taught like mathematics; and so far the Sophists are right, but they have arrived at the truth by a purely empirical process; while Socrates, who professes to know nothing, by simply following the dialectic impulse strikes out a generalisation which at once confirms and explains their position; yet from self-sufficiency or prejudice they refuse to agree with him in taking their stand on the only logical foundation of ethics.

That Plato put forward the ethical theory of the *Protagoras* in perfect good faith cannot, I think, be doubted; although in other writings he has repudiated hedonism with contemptuous aversion; and it seems equally evident that this was his earliest contribution to positive thought. Of all his theories

¹ I regard Joel's identification of Protagoras with Antisthenes as not only false, but the direct reverse of true—a confusion of Law with Nature.

it is the simplest and most Socratic ; for Socrates, in endeavouring to reclaim the foolish or vicious, often spoke as if self-interest were the paramount principle of human nature ; although, had his assumption been formulated as an abstract proposition, he too might have shrunk from it with something of the uneasiness attributed to Protagoras. And from internal evidence of another description we have reason to think that the dialogue in question is a comparatively juvenile production, remembering always that the period of youth was much more protracted among the Greeks than among ourselves. One almost seems to recognise the hand of a boy just out of college, who delights in drawing caricatures of his teachers ; and who, while he looks down on classical scholarship in comparison with more living and practical topics, is not sorry to show that he can discuss a difficult passage from Simonides better than the professors themselves.

III

Our survey of Plato's first period is now complete ; and we have to enter on the far more arduous task of tracing out the circumstances, impulses, and ideas by which all the scattered materials of Greek life, Greek art, and Greek thought were shaped into a new system and stamped with the impress of an imperishable genius. At the threshold of this second period the personality of Plato himself emerges into greater distinctness, and we have to consider what part it played in an evolution where universal tendencies and individual leanings were inseparably combined.

What is known about the birth and family of Plato has already been related. It is uncertain whether he inherited any considerable property, nor is the question one of much importance. It seems clear that he enjoyed the best education Athens could afford, and that through life he possessed a competence sufficient to relieve him from the cares of material existence. Possibly the preference which he expressed, when far advanced in life, for moderate health and wealth arose from having experienced those advantages himself. If the busts which bear his name are to be trusted, he was remarkably beautiful, besides being, if report speaks truly, like some other philosophers very careful of his personal appearance. Perhaps some reminiscences of the admiration bestowed on himself may be mingled with those pictures of youthful loveliness and of its exciting effect on the imaginations of older men which give such grace and animation to his earliest dialogues. We know not whether as lover or beloved he passed unscathed

through the storms of passion which he has so powerfully described, nor whether his apparently intimate acquaintance with them is due to divination or to regretful experience. We may pass by in silence whatever is related on this subject, with the certainty that, whether true or not, scandalous stories could not fail to be circulated about him.

It was natural that one who united a great intellect to a glowing temperament should turn his thoughts to poetry. Plato wrote a quantity of verses—verse-making had become fashionable just then—but wisely committed them to the flames on making the acquaintance of Socrates. It may well be doubted whether the author of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* would ever have attained eminence in metrical composition, even had he lived in an age far more favourable to poetic inspiration than that which came after the flowering-time of Attic art. It seems as if Plato, with all his fervour, fancy, and dramatic skill, lacked the most essential quality of a singer; his finest passages are on a level with the highest poetry, and yet they are separated from it by a chasm more easily felt than described. Aristotle, whom we think of as hard and dry and cold, sometimes comes much nearer to the true lyric cry.¹ And, as if to mark out Plato's style still more distinctly from every other, it is also deficient in oratorical power. The philosopher evidently thought that he could beat the rhetoricians on their own ground; if the *Menexenus* be genuine, he tried to do so and failed; and even without its testimony we are entitled to say as much on the strength of shorter attempts. We must even take leave to doubt whether dialogue, properly so called, was Plato's forte. Where one speaker is placed at such a height above the others as Socrates, or the Eleatic Stranger, or the Athenian in the *Laws*, there cannot be any real conversation. The other interlocutors are good listeners, and serve to break the monotony of a continuous exposition by their expressions of assent or even by their occasional inability to follow the argument, but give no real help or stimulus. And when allowed to offer an opinion of their own, they, too, lapse into a monologue, addressed, as our silent trains of thought habitually are, to an imaginary auditor whose sympathy and support are necessary but are also secure. Yet if Plato's style is neither exactly poetical, nor oratorical, nor conversational, it has affinities with each of these three varieties; it represents the common root from which

¹ Some of the lyric passages in Aristotle's philosophical writings will be quoted in a future chapter. Of his *Hymn to Virtue*, Prof. Mahaffy says: 'It is, I suppose, silently assumed that the author of the dry *Ethics*, and *Politics*, and *Categories* cannot have been a true poet; but I venture to say had the poem been handed down under the name of Pindar, some of those who now look upon it coldly would have been loud in their admiration' (*Hist. of Gr. Lit.*, vol. ii., p. 394, 1st ed.).

they spring, and brings us, better than any other species of composition, into immediate contact with the mind of the writer. The Platonic Socrates has eyes like those of a portrait which follow us wherever we turn, and through which we can read his inmost soul, which is no other than the universal reason of humanity in the delighted surprise of its first awakening to self-conscious activity. The poet thinks and feels for us; the orator makes our thoughts and feelings his own, and then restores them to us in a concentrated form, 'receiving in vapour what he gives back in a flood.' Plato removes every obstacle to the free development of our faculties; he teaches us by his own example how to think and to feel for ourselves. If Socrates personified philosophy, Plato has reproduced the personification in artistic form with such masterly effect that its influence has been extended through all ages and over the whole civilised world. This portrait stands as an intermediary between its original and the far-reaching effects indirectly due to his dialectic inspiration, like that universal soul which Plato himself has placed between the supreme artificer and the material world, that it might bring the fleeting contents of space and time into harmony with uncreated and everlasting ideas.

To paint Socrates at his highest and his best, it was necessary to break through the narrow limits of his historic individuality, and to show how, had they been presented to him, he would have dealt with problems outside the experience of a home-staying Athenian citizen. The founder of idealism—that is to say, the realisation of reason, the systematic application of thought to life—had succeeded in his task because he had embodied the noblest elements of the Athenian Dêmos, orderliness, patriotism, self-control, and publicity of debate, together with a receptive intelligence for improvements effected in other states. But, just as the impulse which enabled those qualities to tell decisively on Greek history at a moment of inestimable importance came from the Athenian aristocracy, with its Dorian sympathies, its adventurous ambition, and its keen attention to foreign affairs, so also did Plato, carrying the same spirit into philosophy, bring the dialectic method into contact with older and broader currents of speculation, and employ it to reorganise the whole spiritual activity of his race.

A strong desire for reform must always be preceded by a deep dissatisfaction with things as they are; and if the reform is to be very sweeping the discontent must be equally comprehensive. Hence the great renovators of human life have been remarkable for the severity with which they have denounced the failings of the world where they were placed, whether as regards persons, habits, institutions, or beliefs. Yet to speak of their attitude as pessimistic would either be unfair,

or would betray an unpardonable inability to discriminate between two utterly different theories of existence. Nothing can well be more unlike the systematised pusillanimity of those lost souls, without courage and without hope, who find a consolation for their own failure in the belief that everything is a failure, than the fiery energy which is drawn into a perpetual tension by the contrast of what is with the vision of what yet may be. But if pessimism paralyses every generous effort and aspiration by teaching that misery is the irremediable lot of animated beings, or even, in the last analysis, of all being, the opposing theory of optimism exercises as deadly an influence when it induces men to believe that their present condition is, on the whole, a satisfactory one, or that at worst wrong will be righted without any criticism or interference on their part. Even those who believe progress to have been, so far, the most certain fact in human history, cannot blind themselves to the existence of enormous forces ever tending to draw society back into the barbarism and brutality of its primitive condition; and they know also, that whatever ground we have won is due to the efforts of a small minority, who were never weary of urging forward their more sluggish companions, without caring what angry susceptibilities they might arouse—risking recrimination, insult, and outrage, so that only, under whatever form, whether of divine mandate or of scientific demonstration, the message of humanity to her children might be delivered in time. Nor is it only with immobility that they have had to contend. Gains in one direction are frequently balanced by losses in another; while at certain periods there is a distinct retrogression along the whole line. And it is well if, amid the general decline to a lower level, sinister voices are not heard proclaiming that the multitude may safely trust to their own promptings, and that self-indulgence or self-will should be the only law of life. It is also on such occasions that the rallying cry is most needed, and that the born leaders of civilisation must put forth their most strenuous efforts to rally the disheartened fugitives and to denounce the treacherous guides. It was in this aspect that Plato viewed his age; and he set himself to continue the task which Socrates had attempted, but had been trampled down in endeavouring to achieve.

The illustrious Italian poet and essayist, Leopardi, has observed that the idea of the world as a vast confederacy banded together for the repression of everything good and great and true, originated with Jesus Christ.¹ It is surprising that so accomplished a Hellenist should not have attributed the priority to Plato. It is true that he does not speak of the world itself in Leopardi's sense, because to him it meant some-

¹ *Pensieri*, lxxxiv and lxxxv.

thing different—a divinely created order that it would have been blasphemy to revile ; but the thing is everywhere present to his thoughts under other names, and he pursues it with relentless hostility. He looks on the great majority of the human race, individually and socially, in their beliefs and in their practices, as utterly corrupt, and blinded to such an extent that they are ready to turn and rend any one who attempts to lead them into a better path. The many ‘know not wisdom and virtue, and are always busy with gluttony and sensuality. Like cattle, with their eyes always looking down and their heads stooping, not, indeed, to the earth, but to the dining-table, they fatten and feed and breed, and in their excessive love of these delights they kick and butt at one another with horns and hoofs which are made of iron ; and they kill one another by reason of their insatiable lust.’¹ Their ideal is the man who nurses up his desires to the utmost intensity, and procures the means for gratifying them by fraud or violence. The assembled multitude resembles a strong and fierce brute expressing its wishes by inarticulate grunts, which the popular leaders make it their business to understand and to comply with. A statesman of the nobler kind who should attempt to benefit the people by thwarting their foolish appetites will be denounced as a public enemy by the demagogues, and will stand no more chance of acquittal than a physican if he were brought before a jury of children by the pastry-cook.²

That an Athenian, or, indeed, any Greek gentleman, should regard the common people with contempt and aversion was nothing strange. A generation earlier such feelings would have led Plato to look on the overthrow of democracy and the establishment of an aristocratic government as the remedy for every evil. The upper classes, accustomed to decorate themselves with complimentary titles, had actually come to believe that all who belonged to them were paragons of wisdom and goodness. With the rule of the Thirty came a terrible awakening. In a few months more atrocities were perpetrated by the oligarchs than the Dêmos had been guilty of in as many generations. It was shown that accomplished gentlemen like Critias were only distinguished from the common herd by their greater impatience of opposition and by the more destructive fury of their appetites. With Plato, at least, all illusions on this head came to an end. He now ‘smiled at the claims of long descent,’ considering that ‘every man has had thousands and thousands of progenitors, and among them have been rich and poor, kings and slaves, Hellenes and barbarians, many times over ;’ and even the possession of a large landed property ceased to inspire him

¹ *Repub.*, 586, A. Jowett, vol. iii., p. 481.

² *Gorgias*, 521, E.

with any respect when he compared it with the surface of the whole earth.¹

There still remained one form of Government to be tried, the despotic rule of a single individual. In the course of his travels Plato came into contact with an able and powerful specimen of the tyrant class, the elder Dionysius. A number of stories relating to their intercourse have been preserved; but the different versions disagree very widely, and none of them can be entirely trusted. It seems likely enough that Plato gave great offence to the tyrant by his freedom of speech; though the story that he was sold into slavery and only redeemed from that condition by the generosity of Anniceris, a Cyrenaean philosopher, is probably a fable. It is supposed that the scathing description in which Plato has held up to everlasting infamy the unworthy possessor of absolute power—a description long afterwards applied by Tacitus to Tiberius—was suggested by the type which had come under his own observation in Sicily.

Of all existing constitutions that of Sparta approached nearest to the ideal of Plato, or, rather, he regarded it as the least degraded. He liked the conservatism of the Spartans, their rigid discipline, their haughty courage, the participation of their daughters in gymnastic exercises, the austerity of their manners, and their respect for old age; but he found much to censure both in their ancient customs and in the characteristics which the possession of empire had recently developed among them. He speaks with disapproval of their exclusively military organisation,² of their contempt for philosophy,³ and of the open sanction which they gave to practices barely tolerated at Athens.⁴ And he also comments on their covetousness,⁵ their harshness to inferiors,⁶ and their haste to throw off the restraints of the law whenever detection could be evaded.⁷

So far I have spoken as if Plato regarded the various false polities existing around him as so many fixed and disconnected types. This, however, was not the case. The present state of things was bad enough, but it threatened to become worse wherever worse was possible. The constitutions exhibiting a mixture of good and evil contained within themselves the seeds of a further corruption, and tended to pass into the form standing next in order on the downward slope. Spartan timocracy must in time become an oligarchy, to oligarchy would succeed democracy, and this would end in tyranny, beyond which no

¹ *Theaetetus*, 174 E *sq.* The dialogue quoted is now held to come rather late in the Platonic series; but I cannot help thinking that the view of society it expresses was formed at an early period of Plato's life.

² *Leges*, 628 E.

³ *Repub.*, 547 E.

⁴ *Leges*, 836 B.

⁵ *Repub.*, 548 A.

⁶ *Ib.* 549 A.

⁷ *Ib.* 548 B.

further fall was possible.¹ The degraded condition of Syracuse seemed likely to be the last outcome of Hellenic civilisation. We know not how far the gloomy forebodings of Plato may have been justified by his own experience, but he sketched with prophetic insight the future fortunes of the Roman Republic. Every phase of the progressive degeneration is exemplified in its later history, and the order of their succession is most faithfully preserved. Even his portraits of individual timocrats, oligarchs, demagogues, and despots are reproduced to the life in the pages of Plutarch, of Cicero, and of Tacitus.

If our critic found so little to admire in Hellas, still less did he seek for the realisation of his dreams in the outlying world. The lessons of Protagoras had not been wasted on him ; and, unlike the nature-worshippers of the eighteenth century, he never fell into the delusion that wisdom and virtue had their home in primæval forests or in corrupt Oriental despotisms. For him, Greek civilisation, with all its faults, was the best thing that human nature had produced, the only hearth of intellectual culture, the only soil where new experiments in education and government could be tried. He could go down to the roots of thought, of language, and of society ; he could construct a new style, a new system, and a new polity, from the foundation up ; he could grasp all the tendencies that came under his immediate observation, and follow them out to their utmost possibilities of expansion ; but his vast powers of analysis and generalisation remained subject to this restriction, that a Hellene he was and a Hellene he remained to the end.

A Hellene, and an aristocrat as well. Or, using the word in its most comprehensive sense, we may say that he was an aristocrat all round, a believer in inherent superiorities of race, sex, birth, breeding, and age. Everywhere we find him restlessly searching after the wisest, purest, best, until at last, passing beyond the limits of existence itself, words fail him to describe the absolute ineffable only good, not being and not knowledge, but creating and inspiring both. Thus it came to pass that his hopes of effecting a thorough reform did not lie in an appeal to the masses, but in the selection and seclusion from evil influences of a few intelligent youths. Here we may detect a remarkable divergence between him and his master. Socrates, himself a man of the people, did not like to hear the Athenians abused. If they went wrong, it was, he said, the fault of their leaders.² But according to Plato, it was from the people themselves that corruption originally proceeded, it was they that instilled false lessons into the most intelligent minds, teaching them from their very infancy to prefer show to substance, success to merit, and pleasure to virtue ; making the study of

¹ *Repub.*, viii. and ix.

² Xenophon, *Mem.* iii., 5, 18.

popular caprice the sure road to power, and poisoning the very sources of morality by circulating blasphemous stories about the gods—stories which represented them as weak, sensual, capricious beings, setting an example of iniquity themselves, and quite willing to pardon it in men on condition of going shares in the spoil. The poets had a great deal to do with the manufacture of these discreditable myths; and towards poets as a class Plato entertained feelings of mingled admiration and contempt. As an artist, he was powerfully attracted by the beauty of their works; as a theologian, he believed them to be the channels of divine inspiration, and sometimes also the guardians of a sacred tradition; but as critic, he was shocked at their incapacity to explain the meaning of their own works, especially when it was coupled with ridiculous pretensions to omniscience; and he regarded the imitative character of their productions as illustrating, in a particularly flagrant manner, that substitution of appearance for reality which, according to his philosophy, was the deepest source of error and evil.

If private society exercised a demoralising influence on its most gifted members, and in turn suffered a still further debasement by listening to their opinions, the same fatal interchange of corruption went on still more actively in public life, so far, at least, as Athenian democracy was concerned. The people would tolerate no statesman who did not pamper their appetites; and the statesmen, for their own ambitious purposes, attended solely to the material wants of the people, entirely neglecting their spiritual interests. In this respect, Pericles, the most admired of all, had been the chief of sinners; for 'he was the first who gave the people pay and made them idle and cowardly, and encouraged them in the love of talk and of money.' Accordingly, a righteous retribution overtook him, for 'at the very end of his life they convicted him of theft, and almost put him to death.' So it had been with the other boasted leaders, Miltiades, Themistocles, and Cimon; all suffered from what is falsely called the ingratitude of the people. Like injudicious keepers, they had made the animal committed to their charge fiercer instead of gentler, until its savage propensities were turned against themselves. Or, changing the comparison, they were like purveyors of luxury, who fed the State on a diet to which its present 'ulcerated and swollen condition' was due. They had 'filled the city full of harbours, and docks, and walls, and revenues and all that, and had left no room for justice and temperance.' One only among the elder statesmen, Aristides, is excepted from this sweeping condemnation, and, similarly, Socrates is declared to have been the only true statesman of his time.¹

¹ *Gorgias*, 515, C, *sqq.* Jowett, vol. ii., pp. 396-400.

On turning from the conduct of State affairs to the administration of justice in the popular law courts, we find the same tale of iniquity repeated, but this time with more telling satire, as Plato is speaking from his own immediate experience. He considers that, under the manipulation of dexterous pleaders, judicial decisions had come to be framed with a total disregard of righteousness. That disputed claims should be submitted to a popular tribunal and settled by counting heads was, indeed, according to his view, a virtual admission that no absolute standard of justice existed; that moral truth varied with individual opinion. And this is how the character of the lawyer had been moulded in consequence:—

He has become keen and shrewd; he has learned how to flatter his master in word and indulge him in deed; but his soul is small and unrighteous. His slavish condition has deprived him of growth and uprightness and independence; dangers and fears which were too much for his truth and honesty came upon him in early years, when the tenderness of youth was unequal to them, and he has been driven into crooked ways; from the first he has practised deception and retaliation, and has become stunted and warped. And so he has passed out of youth into manhood, having no soundness in him, and is now, as he thinks, a master in wisdom.¹

To make matters worse, the original of this unflattering portrait was rapidly becoming the most powerful man in the State. Increasing specialisation had completely separated the military and political functions which had formerly been discharged by a single eminent individual, and the business of legislation was also becoming a distinct profession. No orator could obtain a hearing in the assembly who had not a technical acquaintance with the subject of deliberation, if it admitted of technical treatment, which was much more frequently the case now than in the preceding generation. As a consequence of this revolution, the ultimate power of supervision and control was passing into the hands of the law courts, where general questions could be discussed in a more popular style, and often from a wider or a more sentimental point of view. They were, in fact, beginning to wield an authority like that exercised until quite lately by the press in modern Europe, only that its action was much more direct and formidable. A vote of the *Ecclêsia* could only deprive a statesman of office: a vote of the *Dicastery* might deprive him of civil rights, home, freedom, property, or even life itself. Moreover, with the loss of empire and the decline of public spirit, private interests had come to attract a proportionately larger share of attention; and unobtrusive citizens who had formerly escaped from the storms of

¹ *Theaetêtus*, 173, A. Jowett, vol. iv., p. 322.

party passion, now found themselves marked out as a prey by every fluent and dexterous pleader who could find an excuse for dragging them before the courts. Rhetoric was hailed as the supreme art, enabling its possessor to dispense with every other study, and promising young men were encouraged to look on it as the most paying line they could take up. Even those whose civil status or natural timidity precluded them from speaking in public could gain an eminent and envied position by composing speeches for others to deliver. Behind these, again, stood the professed masters of rhetoric, claiming to direct the education and the whole public opinion of the age by their lectures and pamphlets. Philosophy was not excluded from their system of training, but it occupied a strictly subordinate place. Studied in moderation, they looked on it as a bracing mental exercise and a repertory of sounding commonplaces, if not as a solvent for old-fashioned notions of honesty ; but a close adherence to the laws of logic or to the principles of morality seemed puerile pedantry to the elegant stylists who made themselves the advocates of every crowned flibuster abroad, while preaching a policy of peace at any price at home.

It is evident that the fate of Socrates was constantly in Plato's thoughts, and greatly embittered his scorn for the multitude as well as for those who made themselves its ministers and minions. It so happened that his friend's three accusers had been respectively a poet, a statesman, and a rhetor ; thus aptly typifying to the philosopher's lively imagination the triad of charlatans in whom public opinion found its appropriate representatives and spokesmen. Yet Plato ought consistently to have held that the condemnation of Socrates was, equally with the persecution of Pericles, a satire on the teaching which, after at least thirty years' exercise, had left its auditors more corrupt than it found them. In like manner the ostracism of Aristides might be set against similar sentences passed on less puritanical statesmen. For the purpose of the argument it would have been sufficient to show that in existing circumstances the office of public adviser was both thankless and dangerous. We must always remember that when Plato is speaking of past times he is profoundly influenced by aristocratic traditions, and also that under a retrospective disguise he is really attacking contemporary abuses. And if, even then, his denunciations seem excessive, their justification may be found in that continued decay of public virtue which, not long afterwards, brought about the final catastrophe of Athenian independence.

IV

To illustrate the relation in which Plato stood towards his own times, the productions of his maturer manhood have been largely drawn upon. We have now to take up the broken thread of our systematic exposition, and to trace the development of his philosophy through that wonderful series of compositions which entitle him to rank among the greatest writers, the most comprehensive thinkers, and the purest religious teachers of all ages. In the presence of such glory a mere divergence of opinion must not be permitted to influence our judgment. High above all particular truths stands the principle that truth itself exists, and it was for this that Plato fought. If there were others more completely emancipated from superstition, none so persistently appealed to the logic before which superstition must ultimately vanish. If his schemes for the reconstruction of society ignore many obvious facts, they assert with unrivalled force the necessary supremacy of public welfare over private pleasure; and their avowed utilitarianism offers a common ground to the rival reformers who will have nothing to do with the mysticism of their metaphysical foundation. Those, again, who hold, like the youthful Plato himself, that the ultimate interpretation of existence belongs to a science transcending human reason, will here find the doctrines of their religion anticipated as in a dream. And even those who, standing aloof both from theology and philosophy, live, as they imagine, for beauty alone, will observe with interest how the spirit of Greek art survived in the denunciation of its idolatry, and 'the light that never was on sea or land,' after fading away from the lower levels of Athenian fancy, came once more to suffuse the frozen steeps of dialectic with its latest and divinest rays.

The glowing enthusiasm of Plato is, however, not entirely derived from the poetic traditions of his native city; or perhaps we should rather say that he and the great writers who preceded him drew from a common fount of inspiration. Emerson, in one of the most penetrating criticisms ever written on our philosopher,¹ has pointed out the existence of two distinct elements in the Platonic dialogues—one dispersive, practical, prosaic; the other mystical, absorbing, centripetal. The American scholar is, however, quite mistaken when he attributes the second of these tendencies to Asiatic influence. It is extremely doubtful whether Plato ever travelled farther east than Egypt; it is probable that his stay in that country was not of long duration; and it is certain that he did not acquire a single metaphysical idea from its inhabitants. He liked their rigid conservatism; he

¹ The lecture on Plato in *Representative Men*.

liked their institution of a dominant priesthood ; he liked their system of popular education, and the place which it gave to mathematics made him look with shame on the 'swinish ignorance' of his own countrymen in that respect ;¹ but on the whole he classes them among the races exclusively devoted to money-making, and in aptitude for philosophy he places them far below the Greeks. Very different were the impressions brought home from his visits to Sicily and southern Italy. There he became acquainted with modes of thought in which the search after hidden resemblances and analogies was a predominant passion ; there the existence of a central unity underlying all phenomena was maintained, as against sense and common opinion, with the intensity of a religious creed ; there alone speculation was clothed in poetic language ; there first had an attempt been made to carry thought into life by associating it with a reform of manners and beliefs. There, too, the arts of dance and song had assumed a more orderly and solemn aspect ; the chorus received its final constitution from a Sicilian master ; and the loftiest strains of Greek lyric poetry were composed for recitation in the streets of Sicilian cities or at the courts of Sicilian kings. Then, with the rise of rhetoric, Greek prose was elaborated by Sicilian teachers into a sort of rhythmical composition, combining rich imagery with studied harmonies and contrasts of sense and sound. And as the hold of Asiatic civilisation on eastern Hellas grew weaker, the attention of her foremost spirits was more and more attracted to this new region of wonder and romance. The stream of colonisation set thither in a steady flow ; the scenes of mythical adventure were rediscovered in western waters ; and it was imagined that, by grasping the resources of Sicily, an empire extending over the whole Mediterranean might be won. Perhaps, without being too fanciful, one may trace a likeness between the daring schemes of Alcibiades and the more remote but not more visionary kingdom suggested by an analogous inspiration to the idealising soul of Plato. Each had learned to practise, although for far different purposes, the royal art of Socrates—that mastery over men's minds acquired by a close study of their interests, passions, and beliefs. But the ambition of the one defeated his own aim, to the destruction of his country and of himself ; while the other drew into Athenian thought whatever of western force and fervour was needed for the accomplishment of its imperial task.

It will be remembered that in an earlier section of this chapter we accompanied Plato to a period when he had provisionally adopted a theory in which the Protagorean contention that virtue can be taught was confirmed and explained by the Socratic contention that virtue is knowledge ; while this

¹ *Leges*, 819, D. Jowett, vol. v., p. 390.

knowledge again was interpreted in the sense of a hedonistic calculus, a prevision and comparison of the pleasures and pains consequent on our actions. We have now to trace the lines of thought by which he was guided to a different conception of ethical science.

After resolving virtue into knowledge of pleasure, the next questions which would present themselves to so keen a thinker were obviously, What is knowledge? and What is pleasure? The *Theaetétus* is chiefly occupied with a discussion of the various answers already given to the first of these enquiries. In its present form that dialogue dates from a much later period than the *Protagoras*, but it seems to embody a good deal of material derived from some comparatively youthful composition;¹ and this conjecture receives a further confirmation when we find that here also a large place is given to the opinions of the Sophist after whom that dialogue is named; the chief difference being that the points selected for controversy are of a speculative rather than of a practical character. There is, however, a close connexion between the argument by which Protagoras had endeavoured to prove that all mankind are teachers of virtue, and his more general principle that man is the measure of all things. And perhaps it was the more obvious difficulties attending the latter view which led Plato, after some hesitation, to reject the former along with it. In an earlier chapter some reasons were given for believing that Protagoras did not erect every individual into an arbiter of truth in the sweeping sense afterwards put upon his words. He was probably opposing a human to a theological or a naturalistic standard. Nevertheless, it does not follow that Plato was fighting with a shadow when he pressed the Protagorean dictum to its most literal interpretation. There are plenty of people still who would maintain it to that extent. Wherever and whenever the authority of ancient traditions is broken down, the doctrine that one man's opinion is as good as another's immediately takes its place; or rather the doctrine in question is a survival of traditionalism in an extremely pulverised form. And when we are told that the majority must be right—which is a very different principle from holding that the majority should be obeyed—we may take it as a sign that the loose particles are beginning to coalesce again. The substitution of an individual for a universal standard of truth is, according to Plato, a direct consequence of the theory which identifies knowledge with sense-perception. He does not go very deep into the *rationale* of observation, nor in the infancy of exact

¹ Prof. Lewis Campbell, who was the first critic to place the *Theaetétus* after the *Republic*, agreed, in conversation with the present writer, that there is a *brio* about it quite different from the style of the other 'dialectic' dialogues.

science was it to be expected that he should. He fully recognises the presence of two factors, an objective and a subjective, in every sensation, but loses his hold on the true method in attempting to trace a like dualism through the whole of consciousness. Where we should distinguish between the mental energies and the physical processes underlying them, or between the elements respectively contributed to every cognition by immediate experience and reflection, he conceives the inner and outer worlds as two analogous series related to one another as an image to its original.

At this last point we touch on the final generalisation by which Plato extended the dialectic method to all existence, and readmitted into philosophy the earlier speculations provisionally excluded from it by Socrates. The cross-examining elenchus, at first applied only to individuals, had been turned with destructive effect on every class, every institution, and every polity, until the whole of human life was made to appear one mass of self-contradiction, instability, and illusion. It had been held by some that the order of nature offered a contrast and a correction to this bewildering chaos. Plato, on the other hand, sought to show that the ignorance and evil prevalent among men were only a part of the imperfection necessarily belonging to derivative existence of every kind. For this purpose the philosophy of Heracleitus proved a welcome auxiliary. The pupil of Socrates had been taught in early youth by Cratylus, an adherent of the Ephesian school, that movement, relativity, and the conjunction of opposites are the very conditions under which nature works. We may conjecture that Plato did not at first detect any resemblance between the Heraclitean flux and the mental bewilderment produced or brought to light by the master of cross-examination. But his visit to Italy would probably enable him to take a new view of the Ionian speculations, by bringing him into contact with schools maintaining a directly opposite doctrine. The Eleatics held that existence remained eternally undivided, unmoved, and unchanged. The Pythagoreans arranged all things according to a strained and rigid antithetical construction. Then came the identifying flash.¹ Unchangeable reality, divine order, mathematical truth—these were the objective counterpart of the Socratic definitions, of the consistency which Socrates introduced into conduct. The Heraclitean system applied to phenomena only; and it faithfully reflected the incoherent beliefs and disorderly actions of uneducated men. We are brought into relation with the fluctuating sea of generated and perishing natures by sense and opinion, and these reproduce,

¹ This expression is borrowed from Alexander Bain. See the chapter on Association by Resemblance in *The Senses and the Intellect*.

in their irreconcilable diversity, the shifting character of the objects with which they are conversant. Whatever we see and feel is a mixture of being and unreality; it is, and is not, at the same time. Sensible magnitudes are equal or greater or less according as the standard of comparison is chosen. Yet the very act of comparison shows that there is something in ourselves deeper than mere sense; something to which all individual sensations are referred as to a common centre, and in which their images are stored up. Knowledge, then, can no longer be identified with sensation, since the mental reproductions of external objects are apprehended in the absence of their originals, and since thought possesses the further faculty of framing abstract notions not representing any sensible objects at all.

We need not follow Plato's investigations into the meaning of knowledge and the causes of illusion any further; especially as they do not lead, in this instance, to any positive conclusion. The general tendency is to seek for truth within rather than without; and to connect error partly with the disturbing influence of sense-impressions on the higher mental faculties, partly with the inherent confusion and instability of the phenomena whence those impressions are derived. Our principal concern here is to note the expansive power of generalisation which was carrying philosophy back again from man to nature—the deep-seated contempt of Plato for public opinion—and the incipient differentiation of demonstrated from empirical truth.

A somewhat similar vein of reflection is worked out in the *Cratylus*, a dialogue presenting some important points of contact with the *Theaetetus*, and probably belonging to the same period of thought. There is the same constant reference to Heracleitus, whose philosophy is here also treated as in great measure, but not entirely, true; while the opposing system of Parmenides is briefly alluded to as a valuable set-off against its extravagances.¹ The *Cratylus* deals exclusively with language, just as the *Theaetetus* deals with sensation and mental imagery, but in such a playful and ironical tone that its speculative importance is likely to be overlooked. Some of the Greek philosophers seem to have thought that the study of things might advantageously be replaced by the study of words, which were supposed to have a natural and necessary connexion with their accepted meanings. This view was particularly favoured by the Heracleiteans, who found, or fancied that they found, a confirmation of their master's teaching in etymology. Plato professes to adopt the theory in question, and supports it with a number of derivations which to us seem ludicrously absurd, but

¹ 437 A., *sq.*

which may possibly have been transcribed from the pages of contemporary philologists. At last, however, he turns round and shows that other verbal arguments, equally good, might be adduced on behalf of Parmenides. But the most valuable part of the discussion is a protest against the whole theory that things can be studied through their names. Plato justly observes that an image, to be perfect, should not reproduce its original, but only certain aspects of it; that the framers of language were not infallible; and that we are as competent to discover the nature of things as they could be. One can imagine the delight with which he would have welcomed the modern discovery that sensations, too, are a language; and that the associated groups into which they most readily gather are determined less by the necessary connexions of things in themselves than by the exigencies of self-preservation and reproduction in sentient beings.

V

Through all his criticisms on the popular sources of information—sense, language and public opinion—Plato refers to an ideal of perfect knowledge which he assumes without being able to define it. It must satisfy the negative condition of being free from self-contradiction, but further than this we cannot go. Yet, in the hands of a metaphysician, no more than this was required to reconstruct the world. The demand for consistency explains the practical philosophy of Socrates. It also explains, under another form, the philosophy, both practical and speculative, of his disciple. Identity and the correlative of identity, difference, gradually came to cover with their manifold combinations all knowledge, all life, and all existence.

It was from mathematical science that the light of certainty first broke. Socrates had not encouraged the study of mathematics, either pure or applied; nor, if we may judge from some disparaging allusions to Hippias and his lectures in the *Protagoras*, did Plato at first regard it with any particular favour. He may have acquired some notions of arithmetic and geometry at school; but the intimate acquaintance with, and deep interest in them, manifested throughout his later works, probably dates from his visits to Italy, Sicily, Cyrênê, and Egypt.¹ In each of these places the exact sciences were

¹ It makes no difference to the interpretation of Plato's philosophy as a historical evolution whether he visited Italy, Cyrênê, and Egypt or not. But the trend of contemporary scholarship is all in favour of accepting the traditional biography as genuine.

cultivated with more assiduity than at Athens; in southern Italy they had been brought into close connexion with philosophy by a system of mystical interpretation. The glory of discovering their true speculative significance was reserved for Plato. Just as he had detected a profound analogy between the Socratic scepticism and the Heracleitean flux, so also, by another vivid intuition, he saw in the definitions and deductions of geometry a type of true reasoning, a particular application of the Socratic logic. Thus the two studies were brought into fruitful reaction, the one gaining a wider applicability, and the other an exacter method of demonstration. The mathematical spirit ultimately proved too strong for Plato, and petrified his philosophy into a lifeless formalism; but no extraneous influence helped so much to bring about the complete maturity of his constructive powers, in no direction has he more profoundly influenced the thought of later ages.

There may be earlier references in other dialogues to mathematical reasoning, but its full significance is first exhibited in the *Meno*. Here the old question, whether virtue can be taught, is again raised, to be discussed from an entirely new point of view, and resolved into the more general question, Can anything be taught? The answer is, Yes and No. You may stimulate the native activity of the intellect, but you cannot create it. Take a totally uneducated man, and, under proper guidance, he shall discover the truths of geometry for himself, by virtue of their self-evident clearness. Being independent of any traceable experience, the elementary principles of this science, of all science, must have been acquired in some antenatal period, or rather they were never acquired at all, they belong to the very nature of the soul herself. The doctrine here unfolded had a great future before it; and it has never, perhaps, been discussed with so much eagerness as during the last three-quarters of a century among ourselves. The masters of English thought have placed the issue first raised by Plato in the very front of philosophical controversy; and the general public have been brought to feel that their dearest interests hang on its decision. The subject has, however, lost much of its adventitious interest to those who know that the *à priori* position was turned five generations ago by Kant. The philosopher of Königsberg showed that, granting knowledge to be composed of two elements, mind adds nothing to outward experience but its own forms, the system of connexions according to which it groups phenomena. Deprive these forms of the content given to them by feeling, and the soul will be left beating her wings in a vacuum. The doctrine that knowledge is not a dead deposit in consciousness or memory, but a living energy whereby phenomena are, to use Kant's words, gathered

up into the synthetic unity of apperception, has since found a physiological basis in the theory of cerebral spontaneity. And the experimental school of psychology have simultaneously come to recognise the existence of fixed conditions under which consciousness works and grows, and which, in the last analysis, resolve themselves into the apprehension of resemblance, difference, coexistence, and succession. The most complex cognition involves no more than these four categories ; and it is probable that they all co-operate in the most elementary perception.

The truths here touched on seem to have been dimly present to the mind of Plato. He never doubts that all knowledge must, in some way or other, be derived from experience ; and, accordingly, he assumes that what cannot have been learned in this world was learned in another. But he does not (in the *Meno* at least) suppose that the process ever had a beginning. It would seem that he is trying to express in figurative language the distinction, lost almost as soon as found, between intelligence and the facts on which intelligence is exercised. An examination of the steps by which Meno's slave is brought to perceive, without being directly told, the truth of the Pythagorean theorem, will show that his share in the demonstration is limited to the intuition of certain numerical equalities and inequalities. Now, to Plato, the perception of sameness and difference meant everything. He would have denied that the sensible world presented examples of these relations in their ideal absoluteness and purity. In tracing back their apprehension to the self-reflection of the soul, the consciousness of personal identity, he would not have transgressed the limits of a legitimate enquiry. But self-consciousness involved a possible abstraction from disturbing influences, which he interpreted as a real separation between mind and matter ; and, to make it more complete, an independent pre-existence of the former. Nor was this all. Since knowledge is of likeness in difference, then the central truth of things, the reality underlying all appearance, must be an abiding identity recognised by the soul through her previous communion with that reality in a purer world. The inevitable tendency of two identities, one subjective and the other objective, was to coalesce in an absolute unity where all distinctions of time and space would have disappeared, carrying the whole mythical machinery along with them ; and Plato's logic is always hovering on the verge of such a consummation without being able fully to accept it. Still, the mystical tendency, which it was reserved for Plotinus to carry out in its entirety, is always present, though restrained by other motives, working for the ascertainment of uniformity in theory and for the enforcement of uniformity in practice.

We have accompanied Plato to a point where he begins to see his way towards a radical reconstruction of all existing beliefs and institutions. In the next chapter an attempt will be made to show how far he succeeded in this great purpose, how much in his positive contributions to thought is of permanent, and how much of merely biographical or literary value.

CHAPTER VI

PLATO AS A REFORMER

I

IN the last chapter we considered the philosophy of Plato chiefly under its critical and negative aspects. We saw how it was exclusively from that side that he at first apprehended and enlarged the dialectic of Socrates, how deeply his scepticism was coloured by the religious reaction of the age, and how he attempted, out of his master's mouth, to overturn the positive teaching of the master himself. We saw how, in the *Protagoras*, he sketched a theory of ethics, which was no sooner completed than it became the starting-point of a still more extended and arduous enquiry. We followed the widening horizon of his speculations until they embraced the whole contemporary life of Hellas, and involved it in a common condemnation as either hopelessly corrupt, or containing within itself the seeds of corruption. We then saw how, by a farther generalisation, he was led to look for the sources of error in the laws of man's sensuous nature and of the phenomenal world with which it holds communion; how, moreover, under the guidance of suggestions coming both from within and from without, he reverted to the earlier schools of Greek thought, and brought their results into parallelism with the main lines of Socratic dialectic. And finally, we watched him planting a firm foothold on the basis of mathematical demonstration; seeking in the very constitution of the soul itself for a derivation of the truths which sensuous experience could not impart, and winning back from a more profoundly reasoned religion the hope, the self-confidence, the assurance of perfect knowledge, which had been formerly surrendered in deference to the demands of a merely external and traditional faith. That God alone is wise, and by consequence alone good, might still remain a fixed principle with Plato; but it ceased to operate as a restraint on human aspiration when he had come to recognise an essential unity among all forms of conscious life, which, though it might be clouded and forgotten, could never be entirely effaced. And when Plato tells us, at the close of his career, that God, far more than any

individual man, is the measure of all things,¹ who can doubt that he had already learned to identify the human and divine essences in the common notion of a universal soul?

The germ of this new dogmatism was present in Plato's mind from the very beginning, and was partly an inheritance from older forms of thought. The *Apologia* had reproduced one important feature in the positive teaching of Socrates—the distinction between soul and body, and the necessity of attending to the former rather than to the latter: and this had now acquired such significance as to leave no standing-room for the agnosticism with which it had been incompatible from the first. The same irresistible force of expansion which had brought the human soul into communion with absolute truth, was to be equally verified in a different direction. Plato was too much interested in practical questions to be diverted from them long by any theoretical philosophy; or, perhaps, we should rather say that this interest had accompanied and inspired him throughout. It is from the essential relativity of mind, the profound craving for intellectual sympathy with other minds, that all mystical imaginations and super-subtle abstractions take rise; so that, when the strain of transcendent absorption and ecstasy is relaxed under the chilling but beneficent contact of earthly experience, they become condensed into ideas for the reconstitution of life and society on a basis of reciprocity, of self-restraint, and of self-devotion to a commonwealth greater and more enduring than any individual, while, at the same time, presenting to each man in objective form the principle by virtue of which only, instead of being divided, he can become reconciled with himself. Here we have the creed of all philosophy, whether theological, metaphysical, or positive, that there is, or that there should be, this immanent unity of feeling, of action, and of thought, of the soul, of society, and of universal existence, to win which is everlasting life, while to be without it is everlasting death. This Athanasian creed must be re-stated and re-interpreted at every revolution of thought. We have to see how it was, for the first time, stated and interpreted by Plato.

The principal object of Plato's negative criticism had been to emphasise the distinction between reality and appearance in the world without, between sense, or imagination, and reason in the human soul. True to the mediatorial spirit of Greek thought, his object now was to bridge over the seemingly impassable gulf. This must not be understood to mean that these two distinct, and to some extent contrasted, tendencies correspond to two definitely divided periods of his life. It is evident that the tasks of dissection and reconstruction were often carried on conjointly, and represented two aspects of an

¹ *Legg.* 716, C.

indivisible process. But on the whole there is good reason to believe that Plato, like other men, was more inclined to pull to pieces in his youth and to build up in his later days. The two great dialogues next to be considered, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, illustrate the transition from the one phase to the other, and probably belong to his middle life.

We have seen how Plato came to look on mathematics as an introduction to absolute knowledge. He now discovered a parallel method of approach towards perfect wisdom in an order of experience which to most persons might seem as far as possible removed from exact science—in those passionate feelings which were excited in the Greek imagination by the spectacle of youthful beauty, without distinction of sex. There was, at least among the Athenians, a strong intellectual element in the attachments arising out of such feelings; and the strange anomaly might often be seen of a man devoting himself to the education of a youth, his relations with whom might otherwise be of an ambiguous and suspicious description. Again, the beauty by which a Greek felt most fascinated came nearer to a visible embodiment of mind than any that has ever been known, and as such could be associated with the purest philosophical aspirations. And, finally, the passion of love in its normal manifestations is an essentially generic instinct, being that which carries an individual most entirely out of himself, making him instrumental to the preservation of the race in forms of ever-increasing comeliness and vigour; so that, given a wise training and a wide experience, the maintenance of a noble breed may safely be entrusted to its infallible selection.¹ All these points of view have been developed by Plato with such copiousness of illustration and splendour of language that his name is still associated in popular fancy with an ideal of exalted and purified desire.

So far, however, we only stand on the threshold of Platonic love. The earthly passion, being itself a kind of generalisation, is our first step in the ascent to that highest stage of existence where wisdom and virtue and happiness are one—the good to which all other goods are related as means to an end. But love is not only an introduction to philosophy, it is a type of philosophy itself. Both are conditions intermediate between vacuity and fulfilment; desire being by its very nature dissatisfied, and vanishing at the instant that its object is attained. The philosopher is a lover of wisdom, and therefore not wise; and yet not wholly ignorant, for he knows that he knows nothing. Thus we seem to be thrown back on the standpoint of Plato's earliest agnosticism. Nevertheless, if the *Symposium*

¹ See the chapter on the Metaphysics of Sexual Love in Schopenhauer's *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.

agrees nominally with the *Apologia*, in reality it marks a much more advanced point of speculation. The idea of what knowledge is has begun to assume a much clearer expression. We gather from various hints and suggestions that it is the perception of likeness; the very process of ascending generalisation typified by intellectual love.

It is worthy of remark that in the Platonic Erôs we have the germ—or something more than the germ—of Aristotle's whole metaphysical system.¹ According to the usual law of speculative evolution, what was subjective in the one becomes objective in the other. With Plato the passion for knowledge had been merely the guiding principle of a few chosen spirits. With Aristotle it is the living soul of nature, the secret spring of movement, from the revolution of the outermost starry sphere to the decomposition and recomposition of our mutable terrestrial elements; and from these again through the whole scale of organic life, up to the moral culture of man and the search for an ideally-constituted state. What enables all these myriad movements to continue through eternity, returning ever in an unbroken circle on themselves, is the yearning of unformed matter—that is to say, of unrealised power—towards the absolute unchanging actuality, the self-thinking thought, unmoved, but moving every other form of existence by the desire to participate in its ineffable perfection. Born of the Hellenic enthusiasm for beauty, this wonderful conception went on reverberating through the ages and subsequently became incorporated with the official teaching of Catholic theology. What had begun as a theme for ribald merriment or for rhetorical ostentation among the golden youth of Athens, furnished the motive for his most transcendent meditations to the Angel of the Schools;² but the fire that lurked under the dusty abstractions of Aquinas needed the touch of a poet and a lover before it could be rekindled into flame. The eyes of Beatrice completed what the dialectic of Plato had begun; and the hundred cantos of her adorer found their fitting close in the love that moves the sun and the other stars.

It must, however, be observed that, underlying all these poetical imaginations, there is a deeper and wider law of human nature to which they unconsciously bear witness—the intimate connexion of religious mysticism with the passion of love. By this I do not mean the constant interference of the one with the other, whether for the purpose of stimulation, as with the naturalistic religions, or for the purpose of restraint,

¹ Cp. for the whole following passage Havet, *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, vol. i., pp. 286-8. It was, however, written before the author had become acquainted with M. Havet's work.

² Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. iii., capp. 16-37.

as with the ethical religions ; but I mean that they seem to divide between them a common fund of nervous energy, so that sometimes their manifestations are inextricably confounded, as in certain debased forms of modern Christianity ; sometimes they utterly exclude one another ; and sometimes, which is the most frequent case of all, the one is transformed into the other, their substantial identity and continuity being indicated very frankly by their use of the same language, the same ritual, and the same decorative adjuncts. And this will show how the decay of religious belief may be accompanied by an outbreak of moral licence, without our being obliged to draw the inference that passion can only be held in check by irrational dogmas, or by organisations whose supremacy is fatal to industrial, political, and intellectual progress. For, if the view here offered be correct, the passion was not really restrained, but only turned in a different direction, and frequently nourished into hysterical excess ; so that, with the decay of theology, it returns to its old haunts, bringing with it seven devils worse than the first. After the Crusades came the Courts of Love ; after the Dominican and Franciscan movements, the Renaissance ; after Puritanism, the Restoration ; after Jesuitism and Jansenism, the Regency. Nor is this all. The passion of which we are speaking, when abnormally developed and unbalanced by severe intellectual exercise, is habitually accompanied by delirious jealousy, by cruelty, and by deceit. On taking the form of religion, the influence of its evil associates immediately becomes manifest in the suppression of alien creeds, in the tortures inflicted on their adherents, and in the maxim that no faith need be kept with a heretic. Persecution has been excused on the ground that any means were justifiable for the purpose of saving souls from eternal torment. But how came it to be believed that such a consequence was involved in a mere error of judgment ? The faith did not create the intolerance, but the intolerance created the faith, and so gave an idealised expression to the jealous fury accompanying a passion which no spiritual alchemy can purify from its original affinities. It is not by turning this most terrible instinct towards a supernatural object that we should combat it, but by developing the active and masculine in preference to the emotional and feminine side of our nervous organisation.¹

In addition to its other great lessons, the *Symposium* has afforded Plato an opportunity for contrasting his own method of philosophising with pre-Socratic modes of thought. For it consists of a series of discourses in praise of love, so arranged

¹ In order to avoid misconception it may be as well to mention that the above remarks apply only to mystical passion assuming the form of religion ; they have nothing to do with intellectual and moral convictions.

as to typify the manner in which Greek speculation, after beginning with mythology, subsequently advanced to physical theories of phenomena, then passed from the historical to the contemporary method, asking, not whence did things come, but what are they in themselves ; and finally arrived at the logical standpoint of analysis, classification, and induction.

The nature of dialectic is still further elucidated in the *Phaedrus*, where it is also contrasted with the method, or rather the no-method, of popular rhetoric. Here, again, discussions about love are chosen as an illustration. A discourse on the subject by no less a writer than Lysias is quoted and shown to be deficient in the most elementary requisites of logical exposition. The different arguments are strung together without any principle of arrangement, and ambiguous terms are used without being defined. In insisting on the necessity of definition, Plato followed Socrates ; but he defines according to a totally different method. Socrates had arrived at his general notions partly by a comparison of particular instances with a view to eliciting the points where they agreed, partly by amending the conceptions already in circulation. We have seen that the earliest of Plato's dialogues are one long exposure of the difficulties attending such a procedure ; and his subsequent investigations all went to prove that nothing solid could be built on such shifting foundations as sense and opinion. Meanwhile increasing familiarity with the great ontological systems had taught him to begin with the most general notions, and to work down from them to the most particular. The consequence was that dialectic came to mean nothing but classification or logical division. Definition was absorbed into this process, and reasoning by syllogism was not yet differentiated from it. To tell what a thing was, meant to fix its place in the universal order of purposes, and its individual existence was sufficiently accounted for by the same determination. If we imagine first a series of concentric circles, then a series of contrasts symmetrically disposed on either side of a central dividing line, and finally a series of transitions descending from the most absolute unity to the most irregular diversity—we shall, by combining the three schemes, arrive at some understanding of the Platonic dialectic. To assign anything its place in these various sequences was at once to define it and to demonstrate the necessity of its existence. The arrangement is also equivalent to a theory of final causes ; for everything has a function to perform, marked out by its position, and bringing it into relation with the universal order. Such a system would inevitably lead to the denial of evil, were not evil itself interpreted as the necessary correlative of good, or as a necessary link in the descending manifestations of reality. Moreover, by virtue of his identifying principle, Plato saw in the

lowest forms a shadow or reflection of the highest. Hence the many surprises, concessions, and returns to abandoned positions which we find in his later writings. The three moments of Greek thought, circumscription, antithesis, and mediation, work in such close union, or with such bewildering rapidity of alternation, through all his dialectic, that we are never sure whither he is leading us, and not always sure that he knows it himself.

It is possible that the Pythagorean philosophy arose out of the intoxicated delight inspired by a first acquaintance with the manifold properties of number and figure. If we would enter into the spirit of Platonism, we must similarly throw ourselves back into the time when the idea of a universal classification first dawned on men's minds. We must remember how it gratified the Greek love of order combined with individuality ; what unbounded opportunities for asking and answering questions it supplied ; and what promises of practical regeneration it held out. Not without a shade of sadness for so many baffled efforts and so many blighted hopes, yet also with a grateful recollection of all that reason has accomplished, and with something of his own high intellectual enthusiasm, shall we listen to Plato's prophetic words—words of deeper import than their own author knew—"If I find any man who is able to see a One and Many in Nature, him I follow and walk in his steps as if he were a god."¹

It is interesting to see how the most comprehensive systems of the last century, even when most opposed to the metaphysical spirit, are still constructed on the plan long ago sketched by Plato. Alike in his classification of the sciences, in his historical deductions, and in his plans for the reorganisation of society, Auguste Comte adopts a scheme of ascending or descending generality. The conception of differentiation and integration employed both by Hegel and by Herbert Spencer is also of Platonic origin ; only, what with the ancient thinker was a statical law of order has become with his modern successors a dynamic law of progress ; while, again, there is this distinction between the German and the English philosopher, that the former construes as successive moments of the Idea what the latter regards as simultaneous and interdependent processes of evolution.

II

The study of psychology with Plato stands in a fourfold relation to his general theory of the world. The dialectic

¹ *Phædr.*, 266, B. Jowett, vol. ii., p. 144. According to Teichmüller (*Literarische Fehden im vierten Jahrhundert vor Chr.*, p. 135)—the god here spoken of is no other than Plato himself. Even granting the pantheistic interpretation of Platonism to be true, this seems a somewhat strained application of it.

method, without which nature would remain unintelligible, is a function of the soul, and constitutes its most essential activity; then soul, as distinguished from body, represents the higher, supersensual element of existence; thirdly, the objective dualism of reality and appearance is reproduced in the subjective dualism of reason and sense; and lastly, soul, as the original spring of movement, mediates between the eternal entities which are unmoved and the material phenomena which are subject to a continual flux. It is very characteristic of Plato that he first strains an antithesis to the utmost and then endeavours to reconcile its extremes by the interposition of one or more intermediate links. So, while assigning this office to soul as a part of the universe, he classifies the psychic functions themselves according to a similar principle. On the intellectual side he places true opinion, or what we should now call empirical knowledge, midway between demonstration and sense-perception. Such at least seems to be the result reached in the *Theaetétus* and the *Meno*. In the *Republic* a further analysis leads to a somewhat different arrangement. Opinion is placed between knowledge and ignorance; while the possible objects to which it corresponds form a transition from being to not-being. Subsequently mathematical reasoning is distinguished from the higher science which takes cognisance of first principles, and thus serves to connect it with simple opinion; while this again, dealing as it does with material objects, is related to the knowledge of their shadows as the most perfect science is related to mathematics.¹

Turning from dialectic to ethics, Plato in like manner feels the need of interposing a mediator between reason and appetite. The quality chosen for this purpose he calls *θυμός*, a term which does not, as has been erroneously supposed, correspond to our word Will, but rather to pride, or the feeling of personal honour. It is both the seat of military courage and the natural auxiliary of reason, with which it co-operates in restraining the animal desires. It is a characteristic difference between Socrates and Plato that the master should have habitually reinforced his arguments for virtue by appeals to self-interest; while the disciple, with his aristocratic way of looking at things, prefers to enlist the aid of a haughtier feeling on their behalf. Aristotle followed in the same track when he taught that to be overcome by anger is less discreditable than to be overcome by desire. In reality none of the instincts tending to self-preservation is more praiseworthy than another, or more amenable to the control of reason. A certain fierce pride may intervene to forbid the gratification of unworthy desires; but so also may such a

¹ Adapting Plato's formula to modern ideas we might say: A literary education: knowledge of the world: mathematics: physical science.

despicable motive as personal fear. Plato's tripartite division of mind cannot be made to fit into the classifications of modern psychology, which are adapted not only to a more advanced state of knowledge but also to more complex conditions of life. But the characters of women, by their greater simplicity and uniformity, show to some extent what those of men may once have been ; and it will illustrate if not confirm the analysis of the *Phaedrus* to recall the fact that personal pride is still associated with moral principle in the guardianship of female virtue.

If the soul serves to connect the eternal realities with the fleeting appearances by which they are at once darkened, relieved, and shadowed forth, it is also a bond of union between the speculative and the practical philosophy of Plato ; and in discussing his psychology we have already passed from the one to the other. The transition will become still easier if we remember that the question, 'What is knowledge?' was, according to the view here maintained, originally suggested by a theory reducing ethical science to a hedonistic calculus, and that along with it would arise another question, 'What is pleasure?' This latter enquiry, though incidentally touched on elsewhere, is not fully dealt with in any dialogue except the *Philæbus*, which must be referred to a very late period of Platonic authorship. But the line of argument which it pursues had probably been long familiar to our philosopher. At any rate, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and perhaps the *Gorgias*, assume, as already proved, that pleasure is not the highest good. The question is one on which thinkers are still divided. It seems, indeed, to lie outside the range of reason, and the disputants are accordingly obliged to invoke the authority either of individual consciousness or of common consent on behalf of their respective opinions. We have, however, got so far beyond the ancients that the doctrine of egoistic hedonism has been abandoned by almost everybody. The substitution of another's pleasure for our own as the object of pursuit was not a conception which presented itself to any Greek moralist, although the principle of self-sacrifice was maintained by some of them, and especially by Plato, to its fullest extent. Pleasure-seeking being inseparably associated with selfishness, egoism was best attacked through hedonism, and if Plato's logic does not commend itself to our understanding, we must admit that it was employed in defence of a noble cause.

The style of polemics adopted on this occasion, whatever else may be its value, will serve excellently to illustrate the general dialectic method of attack. When Plato particularly disliked a class of persons, or an institution, or an art, or a theory, or a state of consciousness, he tried to prove that it was confused, unstable, and self-contradictory ; besides taking full

advantage of any discredit popularly attached to it. All these objections are brought to bear with full force against pleasure. Some pleasures are delusive, since the reality of them falls far short of the anticipation; all pleasure is essentially transitory, a perpetual becoming, never a fixed state, and therefore not an end of action; pleasures which ensue on the satisfaction of desires are necessarily accompanied by pains and disappear simultaneously with them; the most intense, and for that reason the most typical, pleasures, are associated with feelings of shame, and their enjoyment is carefully hidden out of sight.

Such arguments have almost the air of an afterthought, and Plato was perhaps more powerfully swayed by other considerations of a more serious character. When pleasure was assumed to be the highest good, knowledge was agreed to be the indispensable means for its attainment; and, as so often happens, the means gradually substituted itself for the end. Nor was this all; for knowledge (or reason) being not only the means but the supreme arbiter, when called on to adjudicate between conflicting claims, would naturally pronounce in its own favour. Naturally, also, a moralist who made science the chief interest of his own life would come to believe that it was the proper object of all life, whether attended or not by any pleasurable emotion. And so, in direct opposition to the theory of the *Protagoras*, Plato declares at last that to brave a lesser pain in order to escape from a greater, or to renounce a lesser pleasure in order to secure a greater, is cowardice and intemperance in disguise; and that wisdom, which he had formerly regarded as a means to other ends, is the one end for which everything else should be exchanged.¹ Perhaps it may have strengthened him in this attitude to observe that the many, whose opinion he so thoroughly despised, made pleasure their aim in life, while the fastidious few preferred knowledge. Yet, after a time, even the latter alternative failed to satisfy his restless spirit. For the conception of knowledge resolved itself into the deeper conceptions of a knowing subject and a known object, the soul and the universe, each of which became in turn the supreme ideal. What interpretation should be given to virtue depended on the choice between them. According to the one view it was a purification of the higher principle within us from material wants and passions. Sensual gratifications should be avoided, because they tend to degrade and pollute the soul. Death should be fearlessly encountered, because it will release her from the restrictions of bodily existence. But Plato had too strong a grasp on the realities of life to remain satisfied with a purely ascetic morality. Knowledge, on the objective side, brought him into relation with an organised universe where each individual

¹ *Phaedo*, 69, A. Jowett, vol. i., p. 442.

existed, not for his own sake but for the sake of the whole, to fulfil a definite function in the system of which he formed a part. And if from one point of view the soul herself was an absolutely simple indivisible substance, from another point of view she reflected the external order, and only fulfilled the law of her being when each separate faculty was exercised within its appropriate sphere.

There still remained one last problem to solve, one point where the converging streams of ethical and metaphysical speculation met and mixed. Granted that knowledge is the soul's highest energy, what is the object of this beatific vision? Granted that all particular energies co-operate for a common purpose, what is the end to which they are subordinated? Granted that dialectic leads us up through ascending gradations to one all-comprehensive idea, how is that idea to be defined? Plato only attempts to answer this last question by re-stating it under the form of an illustration. As the sun at once gives life to all nature, and light to the eye by which nature is perceived, so also the idea of Good is the cause of existence and of knowledge alike, but transcends them both as an absolute unity, of which we cannot even say that it is, for the distinction of subject and predicate would bring back relativity and plurality again. Here we seem to have the Socratic paradox reversed. Socrates identified virtue with knowledge, but, at the same time, entirely emptied the latter of its speculative content. Plato, inheriting the idea of knowledge in its artificially restricted significance, was irresistibly drawn back to the older philosophy whence it had been originally borrowed; then, just as his master had given an ethical application to science, so did he, travelling over the same ground in an opposite direction, extend the theory of ethics far beyond its legitimate range, until a principle which seemed to have no meaning, except in reference to human conduct, became the abstract bond of union between all reality and all thought.

Whether Plato ever succeeded in making the idea of Good quite clear to others, or even to himself, is more than we can tell. In the *Republic* he declines giving further explanations on the ground that his pupils have not passed through the necessary mathematical initiation. Whether quantitative reasoning was to furnish the form or the matter of transcendent dialectic is left undetermined. We are told that on one occasion a large audience assembled to hear Plato lecture on the Good, but that, much to their disappointment, the discourse was entirely filled with geometrical and astronomical investigations. Bearing in mind, however, that mathematical science deals chiefly with equations, and that astronomy, according to Plato, had for its object to prove the absolute uniformity of the celestial motions,

we may perhaps conclude that the idea of Good had then come to mean no more than the abstract notion of identity or indistinguishable likeness—a transformation accomplished in the *Timæus*. The more complex idea of law as a uniformity of relations, whether co-existent or successive, had not then dawned, but it has since been similarly employed to bring physics into harmony with ethics and logic.

III

So far we have followed the evolution of Plato's philosophy as it may have been effected under the impulse of purely theoretical motives. We have now to consider what form was imposed on it by the more imperious exigencies of practical experience. Here, again, we find Plato taking up and continuing the work of Socrates, but on a vastly greater scale. There was, indeed, a kind of pre-established harmony between the expression of thought on the one hand and the increasing need for its application to life on the other. For the spread of public corruption had gone on *pari passu* with the development of philosophy. The teaching of Socrates was addressed to individuals, and dealt chiefly with private morality. On other points he was content to accept the law of the land and the established political constitution as sufficiently safe guides. He was not accustomed to see them defied or perverted into instruments of selfish aggrandisement; nor, apparently, had the possibility of such a contingency occurred to him. Still less did he imagine that all social institutions then existing were radically wrong. Hence the personal virtues held a more important place in his system than the social virtues. His attacks were directed against slothfulness and self-indulgence, against the ignorant temerity which hurried some young men into politics before their education was finished, and the timidity or fastidiousness which prevented others from discharging the highest duties of citizenship. Nor, in accepting the popular religion of his time, had he any suspicion that its sanctions might be invoked on behalf of successful violence and fraud. We know how differently Plato felt towards his age, and how much deeper as well as more shameless was the demoralisation with which he set himself to contend. It must also be remembered how judicial proceedings had come to overshadow every other public interest; and how the highest culture of the time had, at least in his eyes, become identified with the systematic perversion of truth and right. These considerations will explain why Greek philosophy, while moving on a higher plane, passed through the same orbit which had been previously described by Greek poetry. Precisely as the lessons of moderation in Homer

had been followed by the lessons of justice in Aeschylus, precisely as the religion which was a selfish traffic between gods and men, and had little to tell of a life beyond the grave, was replaced by the nobler faith in a divine guardianship of morality and a retributive judgment after death—so also did the Socratic ethics and the Socratic theology lead to a system which made justice the essence of morality and religion its everlasting consecration.

Temperance and justice are very clearly distinguished in our minds. The one is mainly a self-regarding, the other mainly a social virtue. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the distinction was equally clear to Plato. He had learned from Socrates that all virtue is one. He found himself confronted by men who pointedly opposed interest to honour and expediency to fair-dealing, without making any secret of their preference for the former. Here, as elsewhere, he laboured to dissolve away the vulgar antithesis and to substitute for it a deeper one—the antithesis between real and apparent goods. He was quite ready to imagine the case of a man who might have to incur all sorts of suffering in the practice of justice even to the extent of infamy, torture, and death; but without denying that these were evils, he held that to practise injustice with the accompaniment of worldly prosperity was a greater evil still. And this conviction is quite unconnected with his belief in a future life.¹ He would not have agreed with St. Paul that virtue is a bad calculation without the hope of a reward for it hereafter. His morality is absolutely independent of any extrinsic considerations. Nevertheless, he holds that in our own interest we should do what is right; and it never seems to have entered his thoughts that there could be any other motive for doing it. We have to find out how such a paradox was possible.

Plato seems to have felt very strongly that all virtuous action tends towards a good exceeding in value any temporary sacrifice which it may involve; and the accepted connotation of ethical terms went entirely along with this belief. But he could not see that a particular action might be good for the community at large and bad for the individual who performed it, not in a different sense but in the very same sense, as involving a diminution of his happiness. For from Plato's abstract and generalising point of view all good was homogeneous, and the welfare of the individual was absolutely identified with the welfare of the whole to which he belonged. As against those who made right dependent on might and erected self-indulgence into the law of life Plato occupied an impregnable position. He showed that such principles made society impossible, and that without honour even a gang of thieves cannot hold together.²

¹ *Repub.*, Bk. ii., 357-367.

² *Ib.*, i., 348 B., *sqq.*

He also saw that it is reason which brings each individual into relation with the whole and enables him to understand his obligations towards it ; but at the same time he gave this reason a personal character which does not properly belong to it ; or, what comes to the same thing, he treated human beings as pure *entia rationis*, thus unwittingly removing the necessity for having any morality at all. On his assumption it would be absurd to break the law ; but neither would there be any temptation to break it, nor would any unpleasant consequences follow on its violation. Plato speaks of injustice as an injury to the soul's health, and therefore as the greatest evil that can befall a human being, without observing that the inference involves a confusion of terms. For his argument requires that soul should mean both the whole of conscious life and the system of abstract notions through which we communicate and co-operate with our fellow-creatures. All crime is a serious disturbance to such notions, for it cannot without absurdity be made the foundation of a general rule ; but, apart from penal consequences, it does not impair, and may benefit the individual's existence.

While Plato identified the individual with the community by slurring over the possible divergence of their interests, he still further contributed to their logical confusion by resolving the ego into a multitude of conflicting faculties and impulses supposed to represent the different classes of which a State is made up. His opponents held that justice and law emanate from the ruling power in the body politic ; and they were brought to admit that supreme power is properly vested in the wisest and best citizens. Transferring these principles to the inner forum, he maintained that a psychological aristocracy could only be established by giving reason a similar control over the animal passions.¹ At first sight, this seemed to imply no more than a return to the standpoint of Socrates, or of Plato himself in the *Protagoras*. The man who indulges his desires within the limits prescribed by a regard for their safe satisfaction through his whole life, may be called temperate and reasonable, but he is not necessarily just. If, however, we identify the paramount authority within with the paramount authority without, we shall have to admit that there is a faculty of justice in the individual soul corresponding to the objective justice of political law ; and since the supreme virtue is agreed on all hands to be reason, we must go a step further and admit that justice is reason, or that it is reasonable to be just ; and that by consequence the height of injustice is the height of folly. Moreover, this fallacious substitution of justice for temperance was facilitated by the circumstance that although justice is not

¹ See especially the argument with Callicles in the *Gorgias*.

involved in temperance, temperance is to a very great extent involved in justice. Self-control by no means carries with it a respect for the rights of others; but where such respect exists it necessitates a considerable amount of self-control.

It is hoped that the steps of a difficult argument have been made clear by the foregoing analysis; and that the whole process has been shown to hinge on the ambiguous use of such notions as the individual and the community, of which the one is paradoxically construed as a plurality and the other as a unity; of justice, which is alternately taken in the sense of control exercised by the worthiest, control of passion in the general interest, control of our passions in the interest of others, and control of the same passions in our own interest; and of wisdom or reason, which sometimes means any kind of excellence, sometimes the excellence of a harmonious society, and sometimes the excellence of a well-balanced mind. Thus, out of self-regarding virtue social virtue is elicited, the whole process being ultimately conditioned by that identifying power which was at once the strength and the weakness of Plato's genius.

Plato knew perfectly well that although rhetoricians and men of the world might be silenced, they could not be converted or even convinced by such arguments as these. So far from thinking it possible to reason men into virtue, he has observed of those who are slaves to their senses that you must improve them before you can teach them the truth. And he felt that if the complete assimilation of the individual and the community was to become more than a mere logical formula, it must be effected by a radical reform in the training of the one and in the institutions of the whole. Accordingly, he set himself to elaborate a scheme for the purpose, our knowledge of which is chiefly derived from his greatest work, the *Republic*. We have already made large use of the negative criticism scattered through that dialogue; we have now to examine the positive teaching by which it was supplemented.

IV

Plato, like Socrates, makes religious instruction the basis of education. But where the master has been content to set old beliefs on a new basis of demonstration, the disciple aimed at nothing less than their complete purification from irrational and immoral ingredients. He lays down two great principles, that God is good, and that he is true.¹ Every story which is inconsistent with such a character must be rejected; so also must everything in the poets which redounds to the discredit of the national heroes, together with everything tending in the

¹ *Repub.*, ii., 379, A; 380, D.

remotest degree to make vice attractive or virtue repellent. It is evident that Plato, like Xenophanes, repudiated not only the scandalous details of popular mythology, but also the anthropomorphic conceptions which lay at its foundation; although he did not think it advisable to state his unbelief with equal frankness. His own theology was a sort of star-worship, and he proved the divinity of the heavenly bodies by an appeal to the uniformity of their movements.¹ He further taught that the world was created by an absolutely good Being; but we cannot be sure that this was more than a popular version of the theory which placed the abstract idea of Good at the summit of the dialectic series, and that idea, as we know, is beyond existence; in other words, it is an ideal not yet realised but awaiting its realisation. The truth is that there are two distinct types of religion, the one chiefly interested in the existence and attributes of God, the other chiefly interested in the destiny of the human soul. The former is best represented by Judaism, the latter by Buddhism. Plato belongs to the psychic rather than to the theistic type. The doctrine of immortality appears again and again in his dialogues, and one of the most beautiful among them (the *Phaedo*) is entirely devoted to proving it.² He seems throughout to be conscious that he is arguing in favour of a paradox. Here, at least, there are no appeals to popular prejudice such as figure so largely in similar discussions among ourselves. The belief in immortality had long been stirring; but it had not taken deep root among the Ionian Greeks. We cannot even be sure that it was embraced as a consoling hope by any but the highest minds anywhere in Hellas, or by them for more than a brief period. It would be easy to maintain that this arose from some natural incongeniality to the Greek imagination in thoughts which drew it away from the world of sense and the delights of earthly life. But the explanation breaks down immediately when we attempt to verify it by a wider experience. No modern nation enjoys life so keenly as the French. Yet, quite apart from traditional dogmas, there is no nation that counts so many earnest supporters of the belief in a spiritual existence beyond the grave. And, to take an individual example, it is just the keen relish which Browning's Cleon has for every sort of enjoyment that

¹ *Leges*, 899 A.

² Since writing the above, I have come to recognise the high probability at least of Prof. Teichmüller's contention that Plato did not himself believe either in an antenatal existence or in a personal immortality. The important thing, however, is that he wished others to accept both as making for edification, and that the whole doctrine was an integral element of his reformed ethical religion. It may be noticed that the religion of the Koran is primarily a religion of immortality, the divine omnipotence being valued solely (if I am not mistaken) as an instrument for raising the dead to everlasting life; whereas the popular religion of the *Arabian Nights* consists solely in submission to the divine will.

makes him shrink back with horror from the thought of annihilation, and grasp at any promise of a happiness to be prolonged through eternity. A closer examination is needed to show us by what causes the current of Greek thought was swayed.

The great religious movement of the sixth and fifth centuries—chiefly represented for us by the names of Pythagoras, Aeschylus, and Pindar—would in all probability have entirely won over the educated classes, and given definiteness to the half-articulate utterances of popular tradition, had it not been prematurely arrested by the development of physical speculation. So far as materialism is possible without conscious opposition to spiritualism, Greek philosophy in its earliest stages was materialistic. It differed, indeed, from modern materialism in holding that the soul, or seat of conscious life, is an entity distinct from the body; but the distinction was one between a grosser and a finer matter, or else between a simpler and a more complex arrangement of the same matter, not between an extended and an indivisible substance. Whatever theories, then, were entertained with respect to the one would inevitably come to be entertained also with respect to the other. Now, with the exception of the Eleates, who denied the reality of change and separation altogether, every school agreed in teaching that all particular bodies are formed either by differentiation or by decomposition and recomposition out of the same primordial elements. From this it followed, as a natural consequence, that, although the whole mass of matter was eternal, each particular aggregate of matter must perish in order to release the elements required for the formation of new aggregates. Assuming the soul to be material, its immortality was obviously irreconcilable with such a doctrine as this. A combination of four elements and two conflicting forces, such as Empedocles supposed the human mind to be, could not possibly outlast the organism in which it was enclosed; and if Empedocles himself, by an inconsistency not uncommon with men of genius, refused to draw the only legitimate conclusion from his own principles, the discrepancy could not fail to force itself on his successors. Still more fatal to the belief in a continuance of personal identity after death was the theory put forward by Diogenes of Apollonia, that there is really no personal identity even in life—that consciousness is only maintained by a perpetual inhalation of the vital air in which all reason resides. The soul very literally left the body with the last breath, and had a poor chance of holding together afterwards, especially, as the wits observed, if a high wind happened to be blowing at the time.

It would appear that even in the Pythagorean school there had been a reaction against a doctrine which its founder had

been the first to popularise in Hellas. The Pythagoreans had always attributed great importance to the conceptions of harmony and numerical proportion ; and they soon came to think of the soul as a ratio which the different elements of the animal body bore to one another ; or as a musical concord resulting from the joint action of its various members, which might be compared to the strings of a lute. But

‘ When the lute is broken
Sweet tones are remembered not.’

And so, with the dissolution of our bodily organism, the music of consciousness would pass away for ever. Perhaps no form of psychology taught in the Greek schools has approached nearer to modern thought than this. It was professed at Thebes by two Pythagoreans, Cebes and Simmias, in the time of Plato. He rightly regarded them as formidable opponents, for they were ready to grant whatever he claimed for the soul in the way of immateriality and superiority to the body, while denying the possibility of its separate existence. The direct argument by which he met them was a reference to the moving power of mind, and to the constraint exercised by reason over passionate impulse ; characteristics which the analogy with a musical harmony failed to explain. But his chief reliance was on an order of considerations, the historical genesis of which has now to be traced.

It was by that somewhat slow and circuitous process, the negation of a negation, that spiritualism was finally established. The shadows of doubt had to gather round the whole horizon of knowledge still more thickly before another attempt could be made to remove them from futurity. For the scepticism of the Humanists and the ethical dialectic of Socrates, if they tended to weaken the dogmatic materialism of physical philosophy, were at first not more favourable to the new faith which that philosophy had suddenly eclipsed. For Protagoras rejected every kind of supernaturalism ; and Socrates did not attempt to go behind what had been directly revealed by the gods, or was discoverable from an examination of their handiwork. Nevertheless, the new enquiries, with their exclusively subjective direction, paved the way for a return to the religious development previously in progress. By leading men to think of mind as, above all, a principle of knowledge and deliberate action, they altogether freed it from those material associations which brought it under the laws of external nature, where every finite existence was destined, sooner or later, to be reabsorbed and to disappear. The position was completely reversed when nature was, as it were, brought up before the bar of mind to have her constitution determined or her very existence denied by that

supreme tribunal. If the subjective idealism of Protagoras and Gorgias made for spiritualism, so also did the teleological religion of Socrates. It was impossible to assert the priority and superiority of mind to matter more strongly than by teaching that a designing intelligence had created the whole visible universe for the exclusive enjoyment of man. The infinite without was in its turn absorbed by the infinite within. Finally, the logical method of Socrates contained in itself the germs of a still subtler spiritualism which Plato now proceeded to work out.

The dialectic theory, considered in its relation to physics, tended to substitute the study of uniformity for the study of mechanical causation. But the general conceptions established by science were a kind of soul in nature ; they were immaterial, they could not be perceived by sense, and yet, remaining as they did unchanged in a world of change, they were far truer, far more real, than the phenomena to which they gave unity and definition. Now these self-existent ideas, being subjective in their origin, readily reacted on mind, and communicated to it those attributes of fixedness and eternal duration which had in truth been borrowed by them from nature, not by nature from them. Plato argued that the soul was in possession of ideas too pure to have been derived from the suggestions of sense, and therefore traceable to the reminiscences of an anti-natal experience. But we can see that the reminiscence was all on the side of the ideas ; it was they that betrayed their human origin by the birthmarks of abstraction and finality—betokening the limitation of man's faculties and the interestedness of his desires—which still clung to them when from a temporary law of thought they were erected into an everlasting law of things. As Comte would say, Plato was taking out of his conceptions what he had first put into them himself. And, if this consideration applies to all his reasonings on the subject of immortality, it applies especially to what he regards as the most convincing demonstration of all. There is one idea, he tells us, with which the soul is inseparably and essentially associated—namely, the idea of life. Without this, soul can no more be conceived than snow without cold or fire without heat ; nor can death approach it without involving a logical contradiction. To assume that the soul is separable from the body, and that life is inseparable from the soul, was certainly an expeditious method of proof. To a modern, it would have the further disadvantage of proving too much. For, by parity of reasoning, every living thing must have an immortal soul, and every soul must have existed from all eternity. Plato frankly accepted both conclusions, and even incorporated them with his ethical system. He looked on the lower animals

as so many stages in a progressive degradation to which human beings had descended through their own violence or sensuality, but from which it was possible for them to return after a certain period of penitence and probation. At other times he describes a hell, a purgatory, and a heaven, not unlike what we read of in Dante, without apparently being conscious of any inconsistency between the two representations. It was, indeed, an inconsistency such as we find in the highest order of intellects, the inconsistency of one who mediated between two worlds, between naturalistic metempsychosis on the one side, and ethical individualism on the other.

It was not merely the immortality, it was the eternity of the soul that Plato taught. For him the expectation of a life beyond the grave was identified with the memory of an antenatal existence, and the two must stand or fall together. When Shelley's shipwrecked mother exclaims to her child :—

‘Alas ! what is life, what is death, what are we,
That when the ship sinks we no longer may be !
What ! to see thee no more, and to feel thee no more,
To be after life what we have been before !’

Her despair is but the inverted image of Plato's hope, the return to a purer state of being where knowledge will no longer be obscured by passing through the perturbing medium of sight and touch. Again, modern apologists for the injustice and misery of the present system¹ argue that its inequalities will be redressed in a future state. Plato conversely regarded the sufferings of good men as a retribution for former sin, or as the result of a forgotten choice. The authority of Pindar and of ancient tradition generally may have influenced his belief, but it had a deeper ground in the logic of a spiritualistic philosophy. The dualism of soul and body is only one form of his fundamental antithesis between the changeless essence and the transitory manifestations of existence. A pantheism like Spinoza's was the natural outcome of such a system ; but his practical genius or his ardent imagination kept Plato from carrying it so far. Nor in the interests of progress was the result to be regretted ; for theology had to pass through one more phase before the term of its beneficent activity could be reached. Ethical conceptions gained a new significance in the blended light of mythology and metaphysics ; those who made it their trade to pervert justice at its fountain-head might still tremble before the terrors of a supernatural tribunal ; or if Plato could not regenerate the life of his own people he could foretell what was to be the common faith of Europe in another thousand years ; and memory, if not hope, is the richer for those

¹ ‘Un monde qui est l'injustice même.’—Ernest Renan, *L'Église Chrétienne*, p. 139.

magnificent visions where he has projected the eternal conflict between good and evil into the silence and darkness by which our lives are shut in on every side.

V

Plato had begun by condemning poetry only in so far as it was inconsistent with true religion and morality. At last, with his usual propensity to generalise, he condemned it and, by implication, every imitative art *quod* art, as a delusion and a sham, twice removed from the truth of things, because a copy of the phenomena which are themselves unreal representations of an archetypal idea. His iconoclasm may remind us of other ethical theologians both before and after, whether Hebrew, Moslem, or Puritan. If he does not share their fanatical hatred for plastic and pictorial representations, it is only because works of that class, besides being of a chaster character, exercised far less power over the Greek imagination than epic and dramatic poetry. Moreover, the tales of the poets were, according to Plato, the worst lies of all, since they were believed to be true; whereas statues and pictures differed too obviously from their originals for any such illusion to be produced in their case. Like the Puritans, again, Plato sanctioned the use of religious hymns, with the accompaniment of music in its simplest and most elevated forms. Like them, also, he would have approved of literary fiction when it was employed for edifying purposes. Works like the *Faery Queen*, *Paradise Lost*, and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, would have been his favourites in English literature; and he might have extended the same indulgence to fictions of the Edgeworthian type, where the virtuous characters always come off best in the end.

The reformed system of education was to be not only moral and religious but also severely scientific. The place given to mathematics as the foundation of a right intellectual training is most remarkable, and shows how truly Plato apprehended the conditions under which knowledge is acquired and enlarged. Here, as in other respects, he is, more even than Aristotle, the precursor of Auguste Comte. He arranges the mathematical sciences, so far as they then existed, in their logical order; and his remarks on the most general ideas suggested by astronomy read like a divination of rational mechanics. That a recommendation of such studies should be put into the mouth of Socrates is a striking incongruity. The older Plato grew the farther he seems to have advanced from the humanist to the naturalistic point of view; and, had he been willing to confess it, Hippias and Prodicus were the teachers with whom he finally found himself most in sympathy.¹

¹ See note on the Idea of Nature in Plato at the end of Chapter VII.

Macaulay has spoken as if the Platonic philosophy was totally unrelated to the material wants of men. This, however, is a mistake. It is true that, in the *Republic*, science is not regarded as an instrument for heaping up fresh luxuries, or for curing the diseases which luxury breeds; but only because its purpose is held to be the discovery of those conditions under which a healthy, happy, and virtuous race can best be reared. The art of the true statesman is to weave the web of life with perfect skill, to bring together those couples from whose union the noblest progeny shall issue; and it is only by mastering the laws of the physical universe that this art can be acquired. Plato knew no natural laws but those of mathematics and astronomy; consequently, he set far too much store on the times and seasons at which bride and bridegroom were to meet, and on the numerical ratios by which they were supposed to be determined. He even tells us about a mysterious formula for discovering the nuptial number, by which the ingenuity of commentators has been considerably exercised. The true laws by which marriage should be regulated among a civilised people have remained wrapped in still more impenetrable darkness. Whatever may be the best solution, it can hardly fail to differ in many respects from our present customs. It cannot be right that the most important act in the life of a human being should be determined by social ambition, by avarice, by vanity, by pique, or by accident—in a word, by the most contemptible impulses of which human nature is susceptible; nor is it to be expected that sexual selection will always necessitate the employment of insincerity, adulation, and bribery by one of the parties concerned, while fostering in the other credulity, egoism, jealousy, capriciousness, and petty tyranny—the very qualities which a wise training would have for its object to root out.¹

It seems difficult to reconcile views about marriage involving a recognition of the fact that mental and moral qualities are hereditarily transmitted, with the belief in metempsychosis elsewhere professed by Plato. But perhaps his adhesion to the latter doctrine is not to be taken very seriously. In imitation of the objective world, whose essential truth is half hidden and half disclosed by its phenomenal manifestations, he loves to present his speculative teaching under a mythical disguise; and so he may have chosen the old doctrine of transmigration as an apt expression for the unity and continuity of life. And, at worst, he would not be guilty of any greater inconsistency than is chargeable to those modern philosophers who, while they admit that mental qualities are inherited, hold each individual soul to be a separate and independent creation.

The rules for breeding and education set forth in the

¹ Cp. *Lysis*, 210, E. Jowett, vol. i., p. 54.

Republic are not intended for the whole community, but only for the ruling minority. It was by the corruption of the higher classes that Plato was most distressed, and the salvation of the State depended, according to him, on their reformation. This leads us on to his scheme for the reconstitution of society. It is intimately connected with his method of logical definition and classification. He shows with great force that the collective action of human beings is conditioned by the division of labour; and argues from this that every individual ought, in the interest of the whole, to be restricted to a single occupation. Therefore, the industrial classes, who form the bulk of the population, are to be excluded both from military service and from political power. The Peloponnesian War had led to a general substitution of professional soldiers for the old levies of untrained citizens in Greek warfare. Plato was deeply impressed by the dangers, as well as by the advantages, of this revolution. That each profession should be exercised only by persons trained for it, suited his notions alike as a logician, a teacher, and a practical reformer. But he saw that mercenary fighters might use their power to oppress and plunder the defenceless citizens, or to establish a military despotism. And, holding that government should, like strategy, be exercised only by functionaries naturally fitted and expressly trained for the work, he saw equally that a privileged class would be tempted to abuse their position in order to fill their pockets and to gratify their passions. He proposed to provide against these dangers, first by the new system of education already described, and secondly by pushing the division of labour to its logical conclusion. That they might the better attend to their specific duties, the defenders and the rulers of the State were not to practise the art of money-making; in other words, they were not to possess any property of their own, but were to be supported by the labour of the industrial classes. Furthermore, that they need not quarrel among themselves, he proposed that every private interest should be eliminated from their lives, and that they should, as a class, be united by the closest bonds of family affection. This purpose was to be effected by the abolition of marriage and of domesticity. The couples chosen for breeding were to be separated when the object of their union had been attained; children were to be taken from their mothers immediately after birth and brought up at the expense and under the supervision of the State. Sickly and deformed infants were to be destroyed. Those who merely fell short of the aristocratic standard were to be degraded, and their places filled up by the exceptionally gifted offspring of low-class parents. Members of the military and governing caste were to address each other according to the kinship which

might possibly exist between them. Set free from family cares, women, although, according to Plato, on the average inferior to men, are to be educated like them, and to perform the same military and political duties. From the whole communistic class so bred and so trained a smaller number are to be selected and prepared by a philosophical education for the supreme control of the Republic, on which they must not enter before their fiftieth year. These last correspond to reason in the soul and to the head in the body, with its organs of intellection and of special sense: their proper virtue is Wisdom. The armed force of younger citizens, on which they rely for the control and defence of the commonwealth, answers to the heart. We have no single word describing their psychical counterpart: it may best be represented by the medieval sense of personal honour or by the pride of modern women, a feeling equally ready to resent disrespect from without and to fight down irrational or undutiful impulses proceeding from the lower nature within. The virtue of this class is courage, a quality which, after the example of the Greeks, we still connect with the heart. Sophrosynê, now taken in the narrower sense of Temperance, belongs to all three classes, but being the sole virtue of the industrial population, it may be described as characteristic of, though not peculiar to, the lowest class, physiologically represented by the organs of nutrition; while justice is diffused over the whole community as the virtue which gives every one his own, in the sense of assigning to each his proper function and limiting him to its single performance. We may add that the whole State reproduced the Greek family in a much deeper sense than Plato himself was aware of. For his aristocracy represents the man, whose virtue, in the words of Gorgias, was to 'administer the State;' and his industrial class takes the place of the woman, whose duty was 'to order her house, and keep what is indoors, and obey her husband.'¹

The principle of division of labour first applied to political economy by Plato is itself only a particular case of the great law of differentiation used to interpret the whole process of cosmic evolution by Anaxagoras. Socrates then carried it into dialectic, and Plato gave the theory of his master's practice, as against the rhetoricians of his own time, in the *Phaedrus*. He now uses it as a mighty engine of social reform in the *Republic*. Thence after twenty-two centuries it passes into the hands of Adam Smith, who applies it to the reconstitution of political economy, then to the German physiologists, Coleridge, and Milne-Edwards, who carry it into biology, and finally to Herbert Spencer, who completes the circle by again setting up differentiation—now completed by integration—as the universal cosmic law for all orders of phenomena.

¹ *Meno*, 71, E. Jowett, vol. i., p. 270.

VI

After analysing Plato's celebrated scheme of reform, viewing it in connexion with his ethical and dialectical philosophy, and assigning its place in the general evolution of European thought we have now to consider in what relation it stands to the political experience of his own and other times, as well as to the revolutionary proposals of other speculative reformers.

According to Hegel,¹ the Platonic polity, so far from being an impracticable dream, had already found its realisation in Greek life, and did but give an ideal expression to the constitutive principle of every ancient commonwealth. There are, he tells us, three stages in the moral development of mankind. The first is purely objective. It represents a régime where rules of conduct are entirely imposed from without; they are, as it were, embodied in the framework of society; they rest, not on reason and conscience, but on authority and tradition; they will not suffer themselves to be questioned, for, being unproved, a doubt would be fatal to their very existence. Here the individual is completely sacrificed to the State; but in the second or subjective stage he breaks loose, asserting the right of his private judgment and will as against the established order of things. This revolution was, still according to Hegel, begun by the Sophists and Socrates. It proved altogether incompatible with the spirit of Greek civilisation, which it ended by shattering to pieces. The subjective principle found an appropriate expression in Christianity, which attributes an infinite importance to the individual soul; and it appears also in the political philosophy of Rousseau. I may observe that it corresponds very nearly to what Auguste Comte meant by the metaphysical period. The modern State reconciles both principles, allowing the individual his full development, and at the same time incorporating him with a larger whole, where, for the first time, he finds his own reason fully realised. Now, Hegel looks on the Platonic republic as a reaction against the subjective individualism, the right of private judgment, the self-seeking impulse, or whatever else it is to be called, which was fast eating into the heart of Greek civilisation. To counteract this fatal tendency, Plato goes back to the constitutive principle of Greek society—that is to say, the omnipotence, or, in Benthamite parlance, omnicompetence, of the State; exhibiting it, in ideal perfection, as the suppression of individual liberty under every form, more especially the fundamental forms of property, marriage, and domestic life.

It seems as if Hegel, in his anxiety to crush every historical process into the narrow symmetry of a favourite metaphysical

¹ *Gesch. d. Ph.*, vol. ii. p. 272 (first ed.).

formula, had confounded several entirely distinct conceptions under the common name of subjectivity. First, there is the right of private judgment, the claim of each individual to have a voice in the affairs of the State, and to have the free management of his own personal concerns. But this, so far from being modern, is one of the oldest customs of the Aryan race; and perhaps, could we look back to the oldest history of other races now despotically governed, we should find it prevailing among them also. It was no new nor unheard-of privilege that Rousseau vindicated for the peoples of his own time, but their ancient birthright, taken from them by the growth of a centralised military system, just as it had been formerly taken from the city communities of the Graeco-Roman world. In this respect, Plato goes against the whole spirit of his country, and no period of its development, not even the age of Homer, would have satisfied him.

We have next the disposition of individuals, no longer to interfere in making the law, but to override it, or to bend it into an instrument for their own purposes. Doubtless there existed such a tendency in Plato's time, and his polity was very largely designed to hold it in check. But such unprincipled ambition was nothing new in Greece, however the mode of its manifestations might vary. What had formerly been seized by armed violence was now sought after with the more subtle weapons of rhetorical skill; just as at the present moment, among these same Greeks, it is the prize of parliamentary intrigue. The Cretan and Spartan institutions may very possibly have been designed with a view to checking the spirit of selfish lawlessness, by reducing private interests to a minimum; and Plato most certainly had them in his mind when he pushed the same method still further; but those institutions were not types of Hellenism as a whole, they only represented one, and that a very abnormal, side of it. Plato borrowed some elements from this quarter, but, as will presently be shown, he incorporated them with others of a widely different character. Sparta was, indeed, on any high theory of government, not a State at all, but a robber-clan established among a plundered population whom they never tried or cared to conciliate. How little weight her rulers attributed to the interests of the State as such, was well exhibited during the Peloponnesian War, when political advantages of the utmost importance were surrendered in deference to the noble families whose kinsmen had been captured at Sphactêria, and whose sole object was to rescue them from the fate with which they were threatened by the Athenians as a means of extorting concessions;—conduct with which the refusal of Rome to ransom the soldiers who had surrendered at Cannae may be instructively contrasted.

We have, thirdly, to consider a form of individualism directly opposed in character to those already specified. It is the complete withdrawal from public affairs for the sake of attending exclusively to one's private duties or pleasures. Such individualism is the characteristic weakness of conservatives, who are, by their very nature, the party of timidity and quiescence. To them was addressed the exhortation of Cato, *capessenda est respublica*. The two other forms specified are, on the contrary, diseases of liberalism. We see them exemplified when the leaders of a party are harassed by the perpetual criticism of their professed supporters; or, again, when an election is lost because the votes of the Liberal electors are divided among several candidates. But when a party—generally the Conservative party—loses an election because its voters will not go to the poll, that is owing to the lazy individualism that shuns political contests altogether. It was of this disease that the public life of Athens really perished; and, so far, Hegel is on the right track; but although its action was more obviously and immediately fatal in antiquity, we are by no means safe from a repetition of the same experience in modern society. Nor can it be said that Plato reacted against an evil which, in his eyes, was an evil only when it deprived a very few properly-qualified persons of political supremacy. With regard to all others he proposed to sanction and systematise what was already becoming a common custom—namely, entire withdrawal from the administration of affairs in peace and war. Hegel seems to forget that it is only a single class, and that the smallest, in Plato's republic which is not allowed to have any private interests; while the industrial classes, necessarily forming a large majority of the whole population, are not only suffered to retain their property and their families, but are altogether thrown back for mental occupation on the interest arising out of these. The resulting state of things would have found its best parallel, not in old Greek city life, but in modern Europe, as it was between the Reformation and the French Revolution.

The three forms of individualism already enumerated do not exhaust the general conception of subjectivity. According to Hegel, if I understand him aright, the most important aspect of the principle in question would be the philosophical side, the return of thought on itself, already latent in physical speculation, proclaimed by the Sophists as an all-dissolving scepticism, and worked up into a theory of life by Socrates. That there was such a movement is, of course, certain; but that it contributed perceptibly to the decay of old Greek morality, or that it was essentially opposed to the old Greek spirit, cannot, I think, be truly asserted. What has been already observed of political liberty and of political unscrupulousness may be repeated of

intellectual inquisitiveness, rationalism, scepticism, or by whatever name the tendency in question is to be called—it always was, and still is, essentially characteristic of the Greek race. It may very possibly have been a source of political disintegration at all times, but that it became so to a greater extent after assuming the form of systematic speculation has never been proved. If the study of science, or the passion for intellectual gymnastics, drew men away from the duties of public life, it was simply as one more private interest among many, just like feasting, or lovemaking, or travelling, or poetry, or any other of the occupations in which a wealthy Greek delighted ; not from any intrinsic incompatibility with the duties of a statesman or a soldier. So far, indeed, was this from being true, that liberal studies, even of the abstrusest order, were pursued with every advantage to their patriotic energy by such citizens as Zeno, Melissus, Empedocles, and, above all, by Pericles and Epameinondas. If Socrates stood aloof from public business it was that he might have more leisure to train others for its proper performance ; and he himself, when called upon to serve the State, proved fully equal to the emergency. As for the Sophists, it is well known that their profession was to give young men the sort of education which would enable them to fill the highest political offices with honour and advantage. It is true that such a special preparation would end by throwing increased difficulties in the way of a career which it was originally intended to facilitate, by raising the standard of technical proficiency in statesmanship ; and that many possible aspirants would, in consequence, be driven back on less arduous pursuits. But Plato was so far from opposing this specialisation that he wished to carry it much farther, and to make government the exclusive business of a small class who were to be physiologically selected and to receive an education far more elaborate than any that the Sophists could give. If, however, we consider Plato not as the constructor of a new constitution but in relation to the politics of his own time, we must admit that his whole influence was used to set public affairs in a hateful and contemptible light. So far, therefore, as philosophy was represented by him, it must count for a disintegrating force. But in just the same degree we are precluded from assimilating his idea of a State to the old Hellenic model. We must rather say, what he himself would have said, that it never was realised anywhere ; although, as we shall presently see, a certain approach to it was made in the Middle Ages.

Once more, looking at the whole current of Greek philosophy, and especially the philosophy of mind, are we entitled to say that it encouraged, if it did not create, those other forms of individualism already defined as mutinous criticism on the part

of the people, and selfish ambition on the part of its chiefs? Some historians have maintained that there was such a connexion, operating, if not directly, at least through a chain of intermediate causes. Free thought destroyed religion, with religion fell morality, and with morality whatever restraints had hitherto kept anarchic tendencies of every description within bounds. These are interesting reflections; but they do not concern us here, for the issue raised by Hegel is entirely different. It matters nothing to him that Socrates was a staunch defender of supernaturalism and of the received morality. The essential antithesis is between the Socratic introspection and the Socratic dialectics on the one side, and the unquestioned authority of ancient institutions on the other. If this be what Hegel means, I for one must record my dissent. We cannot admit that the philosophy of subjectivity, so interpreted, was a decomposing ferment; nor that the spirit of Plato's *Republic* was, in any case, a protest against it. The Delphic precept, 'Know thyself,' meant in the mouth of Socrates: Let every man find out what work he is best fitted for, and stick to that, without meddling in matters for which he is not qualified. The Socratic dialectic meant: Let the whole field of knowledge be similarly studied; let our ideas on all subjects be so systematised that we shall be able to discover at a moment's notice the bearing of any one of them on any of the others, or on any new question brought up for decision. Surely nothing could well be less individualistic, in a bad sense, less anti-social, less anarchic than this. Nor does Plato oppose, he generalises his master's principles; he works out the psychology and dialectic of the whole state; and if the members of his governing class are not permitted to have any separate interests in their individual capacity, each individual soul is exalted to the highest dignity by having the community reorganised on the model of its own internal economy. There are no violent peripeteias in this great drama of thought, but everywhere harmony, continuity, and gradual development.

Hegel's theory of the *Republic*, has been discussed at some length because it seems to embody a misleading conception not only of Greek politics but also of the most important attempt at a social reformation ever made by one man in the history of philosophy. Thought would be much less worth studying if it only reproduced the abstract form of a very limited experience, instead of analysing and recombining the elements of which that experience is composed. And our faith in the power of conscious efforts towards improvement will very much depend on which side of the alternative we accept.

Zeller, while taking a much wider view than Hegel, still assumes that Plato's reforms, so far as they were suggested by

experience, were simply an adaptation of Dorian practices.¹ He certainly succeeds in showing that private property, marriage, education, individual liberty, and personal morality were subjected, at least in Sparta, to many restrictions resembling those imposed in the Platonic state. And Plato himself, by treating the Spartan system as the first form of degeneration from his own ideal, seems to indicate that this of all existing polities made the nearest approach to it. The declarations of the *Timaeus*² are, however, much more distinct; and according to them it was in the caste-divisions of Egypt that he found the nearest parallel to his own scheme of social reorganisation. There, too, the priests, or wise men came first, and after them the warriors, while the different branches of industry were separated from one another by rigid demarcations. He may also have been struck by that free admission of women to employments elsewhere filled exclusively by men, which so surprised Herodotus, from his inability to discern its real cause—the more advanced differentiation of Egyptian as compared with Greek society.³

VII

But a profounder analysis of experience is necessary before we can come to the real roots of Plato's scheme. It must be remembered that our philosopher was a revolutionist of the most thorough-going description, that he objected not to this or that constitution of his time, but to all existing constitutions whatever. Now, every great revolutionary movement, if in some respects an advance and an evolution, is in other respects a retrogression and a dissolution. When the most complex forms of political association are broken up, the older or subordinate forms suddenly acquire new life and meaning. What is true of practice is true also of speculation. Having broken away from the most advanced civilisation, Plato was thrown back on the spontaneous organisation of industry, on the army, the school, the family, the savage tribe, and even the herd of cattle, for types of social union. It was by taking some hints from each of these minor aggregates that he succeeded in building up his ideal polity, which, notwithstanding its supposed simplicity and consistency, is one of the most heterogeneous ever framed. The principles on which it rests are not really carried out to their logical consequences; they interfere with and supplement one another. The restriction of political power to a single class is avowedly based on the necessity for a division of labour. One man, we are told, can only do one thing well.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 916.

² *Timaeus*, 24, A. Jowett, vol. iii., p. 608.

³ Cp. the excellent remarks of Teichmüller, *Lit. Fehden*, p. 107.

But Plato should have seen that the producer is not for that reason to be made a monopolist ; and that, to borrow his own favourite example, shoes are properly manufactured because the shoemaker is kept in order by the competition of his rivals and by the freedom of the consumer to purchase wherever he pleases. Athenian democracy, so far from contradicting the lessons of political economy, was, in truth, their logical application to government. The people did not really govern themselves, nor do they in any modern democracy, but they listened to different proposals, just as they might choose among different articles in a shop or different tenders for building a house, accepted the most suitable, and then left it to be carried out by their trusted agents.

Again, Plato is false to his own rule when he selects his philosophic governors out of the military caste. If the same individual can be a warrior in his youth and an administrator in his riper years, one man can do two things well, though not at the same time. If the same person can be born with the qualifications both of a soldier and of a politician, and can be fitted by education for each calling in succession, surely a much greater number can combine the functions of a manual labourer with those of an elector. What prevented Plato from perceiving this obvious parallel was the tradition of the paterfamilias who had always been a warrior in his youth ; and a commendable anxiety to keep the army closely connected with the civil power. The analogies of domestic life have also a great deal to do with his proposed community of women and children. Instead of undervaluing the family affections, he immensely overvalued them ; as is shown by his supposition that the bonds of consanguinity would prevent dissensions from arising among his warriors. He should have known that many a home is the scene of constant wrangling, and that quarrels between kinsfolk are the bitterest of all. Then, looking on the State as a great school, Plato imagined that the obedience, docility, and credulity of young scholars could be kept up through a lifetime ; that full-grown citizens would swallow the absurdest inventions ; and that middle-aged officers could be sent into retirement for several years to study dialectic. To suppose that statesmen must necessarily be formed by the discipline in question is another scholastic trait. The professional teacher attributes far more practical importance to his abstruser lessons than they really possess. He is not content to wait for the indirect influence which they may exert at some remote period and in combination with forces of perhaps a widely different character. He looks for immediate and telling results. He imagines that the highest truth must have a mysterious power of transforming all things into its own likeness, or at least of making its learners

more capable than other men of doing the world's work. Here also Plato, instead of being too logical, was not logical enough. By following out the laws of economy, as applied to mental labour, he might have arrived at the separation of the spiritual and temporal powers, and thus anticipated the best established social doctrine of our time.

With regard to the propagation of the race, Plato's methods are avowedly borrowed from those practised by bird-fanciers, horse-trainers, and cattle-breeders. It had long been a Greek custom to compare the people to a flock of sheep and their ruler to a shepherd, phrases which still survive in ecclesiastical parlance. Socrates habitually employed the same simile in his political discussions; and the rhetoricians used it as a justification of the governors who enriched themselves at the expense of those committed to their charge. Plato twisted the argument out of their hands and showed that the shepherd, as such, studies nothing but the good of his sheep. He failed to perceive that the parallel could not be carried out in every detail, and that, quite apart from more elevated considerations, the system which secures a healthy progeny in the one case cannot be transferred to creatures possessing a vastly more complex and delicate organisation. The destruction of sickly and deformed children could only be justified on the hypothesis that none but physical qualities were of any value to the community. Our philosopher forgets his own distinction between soul and body just when he most needed to remember it.

The position assigned to women by Plato may perhaps have seemed to his contemporaries the most paradoxical of all his projects, and it has been observed that here he is in advance even of our own age. But a true conclusion may be deduced from false premises; and Plato's conclusion is not even identical with that reached on other grounds by the modern advocates of women's rights, or rather of their equitable claims. The author of the *Republic* detested democracy; and the enfranchisement of women is now demanded as a part of the general democratic programme. It is an axiom, at least with liberals, that no class will have its interests properly attended to which is left without a voice in the election of parliamentary representatives; and the interests of the sexes are not more obviously identical than those of producers and consumers, or of capitalists and labourers.¹ Another democratic principle is that individuals are, as a rule, the best judges of what occupation they are fit for; and as a consequence of this it is further demanded that women should be admitted to every employment on equal terms with men; leaving competition to decide in each instance whether they are suited for it or not. Their continued exclusion from the military

¹ Written in 1880.

profession would be an exception more apparent than real; because, like the majority of the male sex, they are physically disqualified for it. Now, the profession of arms is the very one for which Plato proposes to destine the daughters of his aristocratic caste, and that without the least intention of consulting their wishes on the subject. He is perfectly aware that his own principle of differentiation will be quoted against him, but he turns the difficulty in a very dexterous manner. He contends that the difference of the sexes, so far as strength and intelligence are concerned, is one not of kind but of degree; for women are not distinguished from men by the possession of any special aptitude, none of them being able to do anything that some men cannot do better. Granting the truth of this rather unflattering assumption, the inference drawn from it will still remain economically unsound. The division of labour requires that each task should be performed, not by those who are absolutely, but by those who are relatively, best fitted for it. In many cases we must be content with work falling short of the highest attainable standard, that the time and abilities of the best workmen may be exclusively devoted to functions for which they alone are competent. Even if women could be trained to fight, it does not follow that their energies might not be more advantageously expended in another direction. Here, again, Plato improperly reasons from low to high forms of association. He appeals to the doubtful example of nomadic tribes, whose women took part in the defence of the camps, and to the fighting power possessed by the females of predatory animals. In truth, the elimination of home life left his women without any employment peculiar to themselves; and so, not to leave them completely idle, they were drafted into the army, more with the hope of imposing on the enemy by an increase of its apparent strength than for the sake of any real service that they were expected to perform.¹ When Plato proposes that women of proved ability should be admitted to the highest political offices, he is far more in sympathy with modern reformers; and his freedom from prejudice is all the more remarkable when we consider that no Greek lady (except, perhaps, Artemisia) is known to have ever displayed a talent for government, although feminine interference in politics was common enough at Sparta; and that personally his feeling towards women was unsympathetic if not contemptuous.² Still we must not exaggerate the importance of his concession. The Platonic polity was, after all, a family rather than a true State;

¹ *Repub.*, v., 471, D.

² He mentions as one of the worst effects of a democracy that it made them assume airs of equality with men. *Repub.*, 563, B.; cp. 569, E. *Timaeus*, 90, E. It is to be feared that Plato regarded woman as the missing link.

and that women should be allowed a share in the regulation of marriage and in the nurture of children, was only giving them back with one hand what had been taken away with the other. Already, among ourselves, women have a voice in educational matters; and were marriage brought under State control, few would doubt the propriety of making them eligible to the new Boards that would be charged with its supervision.

The foregoing analysis will enable us to appreciate the true significance of the resemblance pointed out by Zeller¹ between the Platonic republic and the organisation of mediaeval society. The importance given to religious and moral training; the predominance of the priesthood; the sharp distinction drawn between the military caste and the industrial population; the exclusion of the latter from political power; the partial abolition of marriage and property; and, it might be added, the high position enjoyed by women as regents, châtelaines, abbesses, and sometimes even as warriors or professors,—are all innovations more in the spirit of Plato than in the spirit of Pericles. Three converging influences united to bring about this extraordinary verification of a philosophical ideal. The profound spiritual revolution effected by Greek thought was taken up and continued by Catholicism, and unconsciously guided to the same practical conclusions the teaching which it had in great part originally inspired. Social differentiation went on at the same time, and led to the political consequences logically deduced from it by Plato. And the barbarian conquest of Rome brought in its train some of those more primitive habits on which his breach with civilisation had equally thrown him back. Thus the coincidence between Plato's *Republic* and mediaeval polity is due in one direction to causal agency, in another to speculative insight, and in a third to parallelism of effects, independent of each other but arising out of analogous conditions.

If, now, we proceed to compare the *Republic* with more recent schemes having also for their object the identification of public with private interests, nothing, at first sight, seems to resemble it so closely as the theories of modern Communism; especially those which advocate the abolition not only of private property but also of marriage. The similarity, however, is merely superficial, and covers a radical divergence. For, to begin with, the Platonic polity is not a system of Communism at all, in our sense of the word. It is not that the members of the ruling caste are to throw their property into a common fund; neither as individuals nor as a class do they possess any property whatever. Their wants are provided for by the industrial classes, who apparently continue to live under the old system of

¹ In his *Vorträge und Abhandlungen*, first series, p. 68.

particularism. What Plato had in view was not to increase the sum of individual enjoyments by enforcing an equal division of their material means, but to eliminate individualism altogether, and thus give human feeling the absolute generality which he so much admired in abstract ideas. On the other hand, if I mistake not, modern Communism has no objection to private property as such, could it remain divided either with absolute equality or in strict proportion to the wants of its holders ; but only as the inevitable cause of inequalities which advancing civilisation seems to aggravate rather than to redress. So also with marriage ; the modern assailants of that institution object to it as a restraint on the freedom of individual passion, which, according to them, would secure the maximum of pleasure by perpetually varying its objects. Plato would have looked on such reasonings as a parody and perversion of his own doctrine ; as in very truth, what some of them have professed to be, pleas for the rehabilitation of the flesh in its original supremacy over the spirit, and therefore the direct opposite of a system which sought to spiritualise by generalising the interests of life. And so, when in the *Laws* he gives his communistic principles their complete logical development by extending them to the whole population, he is careful to preserve their philosophical character as the absorption of individual in social existence.¹

The parentage of the two ideas will further elucidate their essentially heterogeneous character. For modern Communism is an outgrowth of the democratic tendencies which Plato detested ; and as such had its counterpart in ancient Athens, if we may trust the *Ecclésiastusae* of Aristophanes, where also it is associated with unbridled licentiousness. Plato, on the contrary, seems to have received the first suggestion of his communism from the Pythagorean and aristocratic confraternities of southern Italy, where the principle that friends have all things in common was an accepted maxim.

If Plato stands at the very antipodes of Fourier and St. Simon, he is connected by a real relationship with those thinkers who, like Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, have based their social systems on a wide survey of physical science and human history. It is even probable that his ideas have exercised a decided though not a direct influence on the two writers referred to. For Comte avowedly took many of his proposed reforms from the organisation of mediaeval Catholicism, which was a translation of philosophy into dogma and discipline, just as Positivism is a re-translation of theology into the human thought from which it sprang. And Spencer's system, while it seems to be the direct antithesis of Plato's, might claim kindred with it through the principle of differentiation and integration, which,

¹ *Legg.*, 739, B. Jowett, vol. v., p. 311.

after passing from Greek thought into political economy and physiology, has been restored by our illustrious countryman to something more than its original generality. In this connexion it has to be observed that the application of very abstract truths to political science needs to be most jealously guarded, since their elasticity increases in direct proportion to their width. When one thinker argues from the law of increasing specialisation to a vast extension of governmental interference with personal liberty, and another thinker to its restriction within the narrowest possible limits, it seems time to consider whether experience and expediency are not, after all, the safest guides to trust.

CHAPTER VII

PLATO'S METAPHYSICS

I

THE social studies through which we have accompanied Plato seem to have reacted on his more abstract speculations, and to have largely modified the extreme opposition in which these had formerly stood to current notions, whether of a popular or a philosophical character. The change first becomes perceptible in his theory of Ideas. These, as objects of knowledge, had originally been evolved out of the definitions to find which was for Socrates the paramount interest of philosophy, the necessary means for making theory instrumental to practice. Combining the Socratic method with the study of geometry, Plato took the further step of viewing the abstract terms reached by mathematical analysis—whether numbers or figures—as the sole foundation of scientific certainty. He found that geometrical reasoning was carried on independently of sensuous experience, and thence inferred that the elements of this and of all other exact science must, in the last analysis, be derived from supersensuous, transcendent experience, variously conceived as the reminiscence of an antenatal existence or as the intuition of eternal truth. The apriorism first suggested by mathematics soon extended itself to those ethical and political studies which for Plato, as for Socrates, alone made science worth the devotion of a life. If units, points, lines, and figures, whether plane or solid, were unintelligible to merely sensuous perception, how much more were such notions as pure Temperance, Justice, Wisdom, and Beauty inaccessible to the worldly experience within which they never approached realisation! But without experience of some sort these things could not have been imagined even to the extent of being denied. Therefore, corresponding to them there must be actual entities, not only really existing as individuals, but the sole realities, that of which the things we call real are merely the fleeting images and shadows, related to them as pictures to their originals or diagrams to structures of wood, metal, or stone.

We have Aristotle's express testimony to the fact that

Socrates did not go this length, that he did not think of definitions as existing in separation from the general names or notions they define. Nor is there any real ground for supposing that any other philosophers anticipated Plato in this daring flight of speculation. The merit of its origination, or the discredit of its absurdity—whichever way we choose to express it—belongs, so far as we know, to him alone. And at one time he seems to have been prepared to accept the extreme logical consequence of his theory. There is, he tells us, in the real world a self-existent archetypal bed of which all manufactured beds are the more or less imperfect copies. And the true philosopher must bring himself to admit that there is—in the streets of heaven, we must suppose—an ideal dirt, for dirt can be intelligibly defined.¹

Detached from their sensuous presentation the Ideas begin to recover a sort of concrete actuality by a dialectical concatenation among themselves analogous to the chain of mathematical demonstration by whose example their independent truth was first established. But while mathematical demonstration depends on unproved assumptions, dialectic, according to Plato—as afterwards according to Hegel,—must assume nothing; it must 'use hypotheses not as first principles but only as hypotheses, that is to say, as steps and points of departure into a region which is above hypotheses, in order that [reason] may soar beyond them to the first principle of the whole, and clinging to this and then to that which depends on this by successive steps she descends again without the aid of any sensible object beginning and ending in ideas.'²

'The first principle of the whole' referred to in this palmary passage of Plato's later philosophy is more particularly specified as the Idea of Good, which we are told is 'beyond existence'—a qualification ironically spoken of as enhancing its dignity, but in truth rather intended to cover Plato's retreat from the extreme Realism (in the scholastic sense) of his earlier position to a theory practically indistinguishable from Nominalism, that is the analysis of general notions into a multitude of resembling objects and a common name. For 'the good' is not now a Platonic Idea in the current sense, but an *ideal*, a pattern not yet realised, but bound to be realised hereafter, and dependent on such realisation for the proof of its value to the world. And as all other Ideas are dialectically deduced from the Idea of the Good, they must be interpreted as the successive steps by which it is carried into concrete living practice—like the Categories in Hegel's Logic—not as entities outside space and time.

In the latest development of his philosophy Plato silently

¹ *Repub.*, x., 597, B. *Parmen.*, 130, C.

² *Repub.*, vi., 511. Jowett, vol. iii., p. 398.

abandoned the Idea of the Good as the starting-point of his dialectical hierarchy for another Idea of a more speculative character, namely, Identity ; but this also is distinctly qualified as non-existent or, as we should say, 'purely ideal,' and realised only in combinations where its purity is lost. To understand by what process Plato reached this conclusion we must follow him through some of what are called the dialectical dialogues, the *Parmenides*, *Sophistes*, and *Philébus*, now generally admitted to come in order of composition between the *Republic* and the *Timæus*.

II

It is admitted that Plato, under the name of Parmenides, has anticipated all the objections subsequently urged against the transcendence of the Ideas, and that he has stated them with a vigour that leaves little or nothing to be desired. Whether he is attacking his own former theory, or the theory of his disciples, or the theory of the Megarians, is a question of little importance in this connexion. The difficulty is that he seems to give away his own criticism by concluding with the declaration that to disallow the existence of eternal and immutable Ideas is to destroy the possibility of dialectics.¹ But such an assertion makes at most for an attitude of provisional scepticism, and leaves the objections to the transcendental theory unimpaired. Perhaps we shall find in the sequel that Plato afterwards hit on a method, more or less satisfactory, for making his way out of the dilemma.

The second part of the *Parmenides* professes to furnish a new mode of testing hypotheses by alternately assuming their truth and falsity, deducing the consequences that result from each position, and comparing them with one another. The cases chosen are the existence and the non-existence of the One. We are invited, that is, to consider what follows from either alternative, first with reference to the One itself, and then with reference to all other things ; the reason given for limiting the discussion to these particular theses being that the counter thesis, 'If the Many are,' had already been discussed by Zeno, the disciple of Parmenides, with a view to defending his master's philosophy against superficial objectors. For Parmenides, according to Plato, asserted that the One alone truly is ; and when people made merry over the absurdities that follow from such a doctrine Zeno retaliated by exposing the still greater absurdities that would follow from the reality of the Many.

It is important to note that the terms One and Many, as used by Plato, are by no means identical with the same terms

¹ *Parmenides*, 135, B-C.

as used by the Eleatics. What with them had been a purely geometrical distinction has become with him a metaphysical distinction. The All, said Parmenides, is one continuum without separation or distinction of parts. For, added Zeno, if space were conceived as divided into parts sundry impossibilities would follow. Plato, on the other hand, means by the One the idea of unity conceived in its very highest degree of generality, and by the Many he means everything besides, everything that is not unity. It is therefore clear that in developing the logical consequences of assuming the existence or non-existence of the One he is not speaking about the universe as a concrete whole; nor do his difficulties find their solution in that view which looks on the Absolute as the reconciling synthesis of contradictory attributes. Indeed he has been at some pains to exclude such an interpretation. In the *Parmenides* itself he warns us that the discussion is not concerned with visible objects,¹ which are just what the historical Zeno was concerned with; the warning is repeated in the *Philébus*, where, in evident reference to the present argument, the common and obvious paradoxes about the One and Many are only mentioned to be dismissed as childish in comparison with the puzzles arising from the consideration of purely ideal unities;² and once more in the *Sophistes* Plato shows himself perfectly aware that the Absolute of Parmenides was not an abstract unity, but an individual extended whole.³ It is then merely by a dramatic equivocation that the Eleatic couple are introduced as talking about the One and the Many in the *Parmenides*; and we have to ask ourselves why Plato should single out that particular pair of terms for the application of the dialectic method by which the validity of the ideal theory is to be finally tested.

The answer is, in my opinion, that Plato has chosen this particular pair to operate on because the opposition of the One to the Many is the most general expression for the ideal theory itself. He has told us repeatedly in the *Republic*, in the *Phaedrus*, and now once more in the *Parmenides* itself⁴ that every Idea is the reduction to unity of what our senses showed us as scattered among a multiplicity of phenomena; while in the *Republic* he had postulated an ultimate Idea, the Good, to which the particular Ideas are in turn related as many to one.⁵ If then the assumption of this highest abstraction leads to a series of inextricable contradictions the very acropolis has been betrayed, the old theory must be abandoned

¹ *Parmenides*, 129 sqq.

² *Phil.*, 14, D.

³ *Soph.*, 244, E.

⁴ *Repub.*, 476, A, 507, B; *Phaedr.*, 265, D; *Parm.*, 128, E sqq.

⁵ 509, A, 511, B. I think this may fairly be taken as Plato's meaning, although he does not state it in so many words.

as hopeless, and a new interpretation of nature substituted for it. The logical value of the reasonings that fill the latter part of the *Parmenides* is not now in question. They may form a chain of rigorous demonstration, or they may be a tissue of sophistry. In either case the net result is the same. The theory of separate Ideas when reduced to its simplest expression lands us in a quagmire of hopeless contradictions.

The method of interpreting Plato by identifying his doctrines with the results of modern thought is often misleading. Nevertheless where there is no danger of confusion, examples drawn from modern philosophy may advantageously be used in illustration or development of his principles and methods. In the present instance Locke's criticism of the theory of innate ideas, furnishes, I think, an appropriate parallel. It will be remembered that the great English thinker in contravening the doctrine that there are certain primary notions not acquired by experience which the mind brings with it into the world and possesses in perfection from the first moment of its existence, opens his attack by disputing the *a priori* origin of the two axioms, 'What is, is,' and, 'It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be'; 'for these,' he thinks, 'have of all others the most allowed title to innate.' But I do not understand Locke to assert that any one had ever in so many words declared these two propositions to be innate; nor am I aware that they were classed as such either by the Stoics, or by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, or by Descartes, the opponents whom throughout he has in view. Anyhow he argues that if principles so general and so certain are not innate, no others are; and although he discusses on their own merits some alleged cases of innateness, the question has, in his opinion, been virtually decided by showing that the supreme laws of logic are not present to every human mind from the moment of birth.

Now what I would suggest is that Plato uses the One and the Many as Locke uses the laws of Identity and Contradiction, namely, in order to cut out the transcendental theory by the roots. For the result of his enquiry is to demonstrate, at least to his own satisfaction, that whether we assume the ideal One to be or not to be, it will both be and not be, and will involve everything else in the same disagreeable predicament. In other words, it is a thoroughly nonsensical conception.¹ And we are left to infer that what is true of the supreme Idea must be true of all particular Ideas; they cannot without contradiction be isolated from the multitudinous phenomena which they unite.

But the interest of the *Parmenides* is not exhausted by this

¹ The notion that Plato had anticipated Hegel in identifying Being with not-Being or dialectically developing the one from the other is, in my opinion, unfounded.

result, revolutionary as it seems. It not only gives evidence of Plato's dissatisfaction with the transcendent realism of his middle life, but it also throws a light forward on the enquiry that was next to occupy his thoughts. This is a point on which his silence becomes more significant than his speech. The dialogue is left unfinished,¹ at least to the extent of having no formal conclusion. The interlocutors do not take leave of one another, nor do they agree to meet for a further discussion of their difficulties. May we not suspect that Plato was surprised in the middle of his search by an unexpected discovery which so to speak cut across his path at a right angle and set him on a new line of reflexion? To hazard a guess, the discovery was that in losing his first principle of existence he had lost, what to him was no less valuable, his first principle of classification as well.

For knowledge as well as for being the first principle took the form of a contrasted couple. Without such an antithetical arrangement indeed Greek thought could no more live and move than one of the higher animals could live and move without bilateral symmetry of structure. Even when the opposing terms were identified, as by Heracleitus, or one side suppressed, as by Parmenides, it was only their simultaneous presence to the thinker's mind that made thought possible. Now Plato, as we have seen, had chosen the antithesis of the One and the Many as the most general expression of his ideal theory. But on profounder reflexion it had melted away under his touch. Each of the Many reproduced the One: the One resolved itself into a multitude of parts. Fatal to his own system, he seems to have believed that the result was fatal also to the Monism of the Eleatics. Nevertheless it was apparently to Parmenides that he turned in search of a new expression for the ultimate antithesis. At any rate in his next important dialogue, the *Sophistes*, three such fundamental distinctions are enumerated, and all three may be traced to the great poem of the Italiote sage; these are, Being and not-Being, Rest and Motion, the Same and the Other (Identity and Difference). Parmenides had declared Being to be eternally unmoved and absolutely homogeneous with itself. According to him Motion and Variety have no positive meaning; they are mere negations, forms of not-Being, and therefore not only non-existent, but even inconceivable, for what is not has most emphatically no being even for thought, since to be thought of and to be are the same. But Plato demurs to the summary logic of his revered master, and at once puts his finger on a fatal flaw in the chain of reasoning. Being and not-Being, he observes, so far from excluding one another in the rigid manner assumed, are found everywhere

¹ I say this deliberately, after reading Maguire's argument to the contrary.

co-existing. To say that a thing is itself is to say that it is not anything else. To remain within the limits of the categories above enumerated, Rest is not Motion, and the Same is not the Other. Moreover since both Rest and Sameness *are* they coincide to a certain extent with Being, but do not exhaust it. Thus in reference to pure Being they both are and are not; while again Being as such is neither Rest nor Sameness, although it rests and is the same with itself. In short, not-Being turns out to be just Otherness, and as an independent category must be altogether struck out of our list, which is thus reduced from six to five members, Being, Sameness and Otherness, Rest and Motion, each participating in the nature of the remainder, with the possible exception of Rest and Motion, the relation between which is left unsettled.¹

These somewhat scholastic refinements—which, however, are filled with interest and vitality in the original exposition—must be carefully borne in mind if we would understand the further development of Plato's ontology in the *Timaeus*. It will be noticed that our old friends the One and the Many are not included in the list of ultimate Forms. There is an occasional reference to them in the *Sophistes*; but on the whole Plato seems to have convinced himself that they were un-serviceable as points of reference in the reorganisation of thought. Or it may be permitted to conjecture that he had now come to identify the Many, like not-Being, with Otherness. In the latter part of the *Parmenides* he had substituted a different expression *τᾶλλα* (the others) for *τὰ πολλά* (the many); this would easily pass into *θᾶτερα*, and then into *θᾶτερον*—the Otherness of the *Sophistes*, and this would at once evoke its opposite *ταυτόν* the Same as a substitute for the One.

As another important result—important, that is, from the Greek point of view—we note that Being has been left without an antithesis, not-Being having been identified with Difference. Now according to a fundamental law of Greek thought that which has no opposite must mediate between opposites. Plato's last analysis then has for its logical consequence the necessity of finding a pair of terms between which Being can be placed; and his table of Forms furnishes two such couples to choose between. These are Same and Other (or in our language Identity and Difference) on the one hand and Rest and Motion on the other. When he wrote the *Timaeus* his choice was made.

¹ *Soph.*, 250, A—259, B.

III

Stated generally the object of the *Timaeus* seems to be to show how the universe is constructed, how a knowledge of its structure has been made possible for man, and how that knowledge becomes available for the reorganisation of human life. More particularly it is an attempt to provide a satisfactory substitute for that ideal theory which the *Parmenides* had shown by two distinct methods to be untenable, and to effect this by concluding the process of simplification first begun and partly carried out in the *Sophistes*.

Plato entered on his literary and philosophic career as a religious agnostic of the Socratic school. Believing like his master that the gods had reserved the secrets of the external world for their own exclusive cognisance, he devoted himself during the greater part of his efficient life to the study of ethical and logical problems, without any absolute confidence in the power of the human mind to solve even these. But increasing familiarity with the work actually done by contemporary science, especially perhaps in western Hellas, convinced him that the 'meteorologists,' at whom he had been taught to sneer in his youth, had reached results both in mathematics and astronomy of undeniable certainty, of great immediate utility, and of still greater promise for the future. Personally his opinion of their abilities might not be much altered: he 'had met exceedingly few mathematicians who could reason';¹ but he saw that their demonstrations offered a model to which the true reasoner was bound to conform. Again, his ethics led him to infer that so mean a passion as envy could have no place in the divine counsels; while his devotional feelings culminated in the identification of the human with the divine spirit. Finally, his political studies taught him that the problem of social reorganisation could not be isolated from the problem of cosmology as a whole.

The study of cosmology threw Plato back on the systems of early Greek philosophy. All of these are more or less represented in the *Timaeus*, and much of its obscurity is due to his not always very successful attempts at a reconciliation between their opposing or intersecting methods. Our business is only with those parts which seem peculiar to himself and which enter into the general plan of his philosophy conceived as a self-developing logic.

Taking up the thread of that development where it was dropped, we recall the significant circumstance that the form or category of Being was left without its original antithesis not-Being, and that accordingly by the laws of Greek thought it

¹ *Repub.*, 531, E.

had to be placed as a middle term between two extremes. Well, the principal speaker in the *Timaeus* tells us in the mythical phraseology employed throughout that dialogue that the supreme God mingled together the Same and the Other and produced from them the form of Being, situated between the two (35 A). It must indeed be admitted that the word which I have translated 'Being' is not identical with the word habitually used in the *Sophistes* to express that category. In the earlier dialogue Plato says τὸ ὄν, in the present instance he says ἡ οὐσία. But in the *Sophistes* also ἡ οὐσία is used at least once as absolutely synonymous with τὸ ὄν;¹ and the latter term has probably been avoided in the passage where the composition of Being is described simply because Plato has incidentally to speak of all three categories, the Same, the Other and their joint product as τρία ὄντα, 'being three things,' and there would have been a certain absurdity in implying that two out of the three were in being before Being itself had begun. If, however, it seems desirable to use the word Being only where the original has τὸ ὄν there can be no objection to translating ἡ οὐσία by Existence.²

To place Existence between Identity and Difference and to represent it as resulting from their union is more than an advance in logic, it is an advance in metaphysics. For what Plato really means is that the supreme Ideas are not hypostasised essences, but simple abstractions derived from the analysis of concrete existence and having no actuality apart from it. Even in the *Republic* he had already hinted at such a conclusion by declaring that the highest of all Ideas, the Idea of the Good, far exceeded existence in dignity and power.³ We may suppose that this superiority consists in the fact that the Good, or as we should say the Ideal, is perpetually moulding reality into conformity with itself.⁴

But this refusal to acknowledge an independent and isolated existence of the Ideas is not to be confounded with a mere

¹ 250, B.

² This is also the word used by Dr. Jackson in his summary of the *Timaeus* (*Journal of Philology*, vol. xiii., p. 6). Mr. Archer-Hind renders ἡ οὐσία by 'essence' in his translation of the *Timaeus*.

³ 509, B.

⁴ Plato would evidently not have agreed with Descartes in holding that the idea of perfection involves that of existence. A remarkable parallel to his position may be found in that last dying speech and confession of French Eclecticism, Vacherot's *La Métaphysique et la Science* (Paris, 1858), where it is argued in direct opposition to the school to which the author originally belonged that all reality is necessarily imperfect (vol. ii., p. 68); and the parallelism is the more significant as Vacherot himself was not aware of it, being imbued with the old belief that Plato hypostasised his Ideas. In disproof of this assertion Prof. A. E. Taylor refers to *Soph.*, 245, D (*Mind*, vol. xii., p. 1). But what Plato says is merely that Being to *be* at all must be the whole (in fact whatever is, is). There is nothing about a morally perfect Being. The ideal Good is beyond existence.

reversion to the common-sense or Cynical point of view. It is the natural outcome of Plato's practical genius, the metaphysical expression of his reforming enthusiasm. What he calls the Same is in truth the assimilative principle, the tendency towards order, harmony, and reconciliation. He has already told us in the *Sophistes* that being means nothing but power, the capacity for acting or for being acted on.¹ Therefore that the Same may *be* it must assimilate the Different to itself, must carry law and order into what else were chaotic. And that the Different also may *be* it must undergo this action, must submit to this assimilation. Nor is their union a type of practical endeavour alone; it is also the mainspring of scientific classification, which for Plato meant science itself, that which makes possible the dialectical ascent and descent through successive groups of things, with a preponderance of identity at the upper end, of difference at the lower end of the scale.

It is perhaps for this reason, with a view to the exigencies of classification, that the Same and the Other, although without reality apart from their union, are represented as not merged in it, but as continuing to preserve a certain separateness as objects of thought. Such at least seems to be the meaning of a rather mysterious passage in which the Platonic *Timaeus* tells us that God mixed together the Same, the Other and Existence to form the soul. It implies that there are various types of existence distinguished by the relative homogeneity or heterogeneity of their contents, and realised in the first instance as more or less uniform or irregular modes of motion.

Here we enter on the most critical part of the whole discussion, and I must ask the reader to give his best attention to what follows. It relates to the vexed question of what Plato understood by soul ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$).

The introduction of a creative God in the *Timaeus* is, of course, purely allegorical. Nothing existed before Existence itself; and no external power was needed to combine the abstract elements into which it is decomposed by thought, as in reality they had never been separated. So much is now generally admitted. But the notion of a cosmic soul seems to be more seriously intended; and it has given rise to theories involving, in my opinion, a complete misinterpretation of Plato and a gross anachronism in the history of philosophy, if, as would seem, they really identify his idealism with the theories either of Berkeley or Leibniz. It has not been sufficiently considered that by soul the Greek thinker means an invisible and intangible, but not—what is for us the decisive note of spiritualism—an inextended substance. In the present

¹ 247, D—E.

instance the soul described is, as may easily be gathered from the detailed account of its structure, a limited area of space divided into several concentric zones and engaged in perpetual movement. That space or any part of it should move is for us an inconceivable supposition; but Plato seems to find no difficulty about it. The difficulty for him would rather have been to conceive space as *not* moving. And these rotatory figures into which the soul-substance is divided are no allegory; they are the orbits of the heavenly bodies, the sphere of the fixed stars with the enclosed spheres (or wheels) in which the sun and planets are carried round the centre of the universe, *i.e.*, the centre of the earth;¹ and in speaking about them as divisions of one great soul he means to emphasise their pure and incorruptible nature, the unchanging constancy of their movements, the mathematical harmony of the intervals by which they are separated, and the spontaneous energy with which their revolutions are performed. Whether seriously or not, these revolutions are represented as being indispensable to the free play of the cosmic intelligence, which through them is kept in touch with every part of the universe and made aware of what goes on through its whole extent. As Grote puts it in his business-like style, 'information is thus circulated about the existing relations between all the separate parts and specialities.'²

The conception of soul as inseparable from extension was inherited by Plato from Parmenides, with whom it was a survival of the primitive animism common to all mankind. After refining down corporeal existence to pure space the Eleatic master proceeded naïvely to identify this attenuated residuum with pure reason,³ a confusion in which he was followed by Anaxagoras, and which Aristotle was the first to overcome. No thinker indeed has ever made more of the distinction between soul and body than Plato; yet the distinction as we find it in him is always somewhat wavering and relative. From the ideal scheme of the *Timaëus* we may perhaps gather that by soul is to be understood that form of existence in which the element of Identity prevails, by body that in which Difference prevails. According to this view, pure space stands for the utmost conceivable amount of Difference, a dim something just at or a little beyond the bounds of legitimate thought. For to Plato as to Kant to think was to condition; only what to the modern is a merely subjective

¹ I am inclined to think that Plato thought of the sun and planets as being carried round the centre of the universe by flat bands or hoops according to the theory of early Greek astronomy, not by spheres as in Aristotle's cosmology.

² *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. iv., p. 227 (ed. of 1885).

³ What proof I have to offer of this, which Prof. Taylor (*loc. cit.*) denies, will be found in the account of Parmenides under 'Early Greek Thought.' By pure space I mean an absolutely continuous, immovable, and (apparently) transparent something; by pure reason I mean thought without sense.

process was to the Greek an objective process also, the process which alone makes existence possible, the process of limitation.

In a somewhat earlier dialogue, the *Philebus*, which like the *Sophistes* supplies a connecting link between the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus*, Plato had described this process as a mingling of the Limit (τὸ πέρας) with the Unlimited or Infinite.¹ With a reminiscence of his first antithetical construction he there speaks of the Limit as one and of the Unlimited as many, though without identifying them directly with the One and the Many as such; while again their synthesis, the Limited, is not treated as coextensive with existence, although a phrase occurs about generation into existence, pointing significantly in that direction.² But as the primary object of the *Philebus* is ethical rather than metaphysical—being in fact to show that pleasure only becomes a good through limitation—the ontological problem remains outstanding and first receives its solution in the *Timaeus*, where the Limit and the Unlimited reappear as the Same and the Other, and this Other takes the shape—if shape it can be called that shape has none—of infinite space, an abstract of the content enclosed by all quantitative and qualitative limitations, and ever striving to break loose from all.

Space as defined and limited by the courses of the stars and planets presented no difficulties to Plato, for there form and content were inseparately united, and constituted the very type of eternal reality. But on descending to the lower region between sky and earth he found it filled with bodies that come into being and pass out of it again, resolving themselves into the form and matter by whose union they had been temporarily constituted. The forms, whether numbers or geometrical figures, or qualities, or groups of qualities, had long occupied his attention; he had accounted for them as terrestrial copies of eternal self-existent Ideas; and now that he had come to represent the Ideas as modifications of the Same by successive combinations with the Other placed visibly before our eyes in the heavenly spheres, it was as copies, however imperfect and distorted, of those spheres that he conceived the inhabitants of earth, as effluxes of their glory and revelations of their power, passing down by a series of degradations from perfect definiteness to something almost indistinguishable from the formless inane. And the inane is represented as a partaker in their restlessness, as swaying about from one to another.³

¹ 23 C, 26 D.

² The opposition here (26 D) is between γένεσις and οὐσία; in the *Timaeus* it is between γένεσις and ὄν (52 D), a clear proof that Plato uses οὐσία and ὄν as equivalent and convertible terms.

³ *Tim.*, 52 D-E. In view of this passage I fail to understand how Prof. Natorp—apparently with the approval of Prof. J. A. Stewart—can describe Plato as calling space 'a fixed abiding system of positions' (quoted by Stewart in *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas*, p. 105).

It is this ascription of motion to what Parmenides had more justly described as absolutely immovable that makes the account of space in the *Timaeus* so difficult to realise. In truth space was to Plato without reflexion what long reflexion has made it to the modern psychologist, not so much an infinite aggregate of coexistences as an infinite possibility of movement ; while again this conception lapses into the conception of matter as at once the subject of movement and the object of sensation. For it is by the imposition of various geometrical figures on pure unformed space that he imagines the primary molecules of matter to have arisen ; and he explains the elementary properties of matter as modes of motion due to the violent oscillations of space acting on particles of different sizes and shapes, aided as would seem by the pressure resulting from the rotation of the celestial sphere ; and it is by the impact of these particles on our bodily organs that sensations are produced.¹

We are now in a better position to consider what has become of the outstanding antithetical couple, Rest and Motion, in the readjusted economy of our philosopher's ultimate ideas. As an antithesis it would seem to have been merged in the Same and the Other. We may, if we choose, very appropriately think of Rest as the eternally self-identical, of Motion as the eternally self-differentiating principle in things.² But it would be truer to say that in this instance the antithetical relation has passed out of sight. Where there is an antithesis there is, at least for Greek notions, an opposite valuation ; and it would be against all Platonic usage not to class Rest as a supreme good. Yet in the *Timaeus* Motion seems to occupy a very honourable position as an essential attribute of the cosmic bodies and even of the human soul, which is represented as imitating their revolutions and as being enabled to reason only by perpetually returning on itself. Nor can this view be put aside as part of the mythological machinery by which purely spiritual relations are illustrated ; for in the *Phaedrus* and again in the *Laws* the soul is described as ever-moving and self-moved, while the Eleatic Stranger of the *Sophistes* declares motion to be inseparable from being.³ In all these instances, however, if I am not mistaken, we are to think of Motion not as absolute, but as combined with Rest. The possibility of a direct union between the two had been suggested in the *Sophistes* and provisionally rejected, but with a hint that the question might be reopened on a more suitable occasion.⁴ And now in the *Timaeus* the solution seems to have been found. May we not say that Rest and Motion are combined

¹ 52 E, 58 A, 61 C *sqq.*

² Indeed as much is intimated in *Tim.*, 57, E.

³ 245 C, 896 A, 248 E.

⁴ 256, B, with Prof. Lewis Campbell's note.

in the perfectly uniform revolutions of the starry sphere (or rather of the whole world) on its axis, of the lesser spheres on their axes, and to a less extent, that is with a preponderance of the inferior element, in all the other periodic cycles of nature? If so another abstract opposition has been reconciled in the actuality of concrete existence.

Reference has just been made to the intimate association between psychic activity and movement. The notion is peculiar to Plato's later dialogues—assuming the *Phaedrus* to have been written after the *Republic*¹—and reaches its extreme development in *Laws* (book x.), where an evil soul is postulated as the cause of irregular movements. The analogy with Zoroastrianism at once suggests itself, but is probably accidental. Where Plato is writing for a popular audience, as in the *Laws*, the introduction of moral values in connexion with physical speculations must not be taken too seriously. The significant thing is the thoroughgoing identification of soul with the cause of physical motion, with what modern science until recently called Force, or even with motion itself, considered as the result of impact and pressure, and the merely secondary reference to feeling and thought. We can hardly suppose that Plato attributed the disturbance of one stone by another—which is an instance of what he calls irregular motion—to the direct action of Satan, or whatever else the 'evil soul' is to be called. The question is rather how far he really attributed conscious intelligence to the animating principles of the celestial bodies. We seem to be dealing with a stage of reflexion where spiritualism and materialism, monism and dualism are still very imperfectly differentiated.

Physic from metaphysic takes defence
And metaphysic calls for aid on sense.

Space, matter, motion, force, life, soul, and reason form a continuous series, our interpretation of which largely depends on the term that we choose to take as the keynote of the whole system. And there is at least one indication going to prove that the idealist view will not bear being too strictly pressed. But here the question, already a sufficiently intricate one, becomes still more complicated by its connexion with the doctrine of final causes.

IV

Plato distinguishes between teleological and mechanical causation, an opposition which has survived into modern philosophy.

¹ Lutoslawski, *op. cit.*, p. 348. The absolute dates assigned by M. Lutoslawski to the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* are in my opinion much too early; but the important thing is the determination of their relative dates, and there I agree with him.

With him as with us the distinction lies between intelligent action for a pre-determined purpose and blind obedience to physical necessity. But at the very outset a difference presents itself between his point of view and ours, which incidentally illustrates the extreme caution needed in the comparative study of ancient and modern thought. For when we follow the parallel into detail what seemed a resemblance becomes a contrast. The spiritualism of Athens is the materialism of to-day. The immutable uniformity, the eternal self-repetition which we associate with blind mechanical causation and which has found its most general expression in the doctrine of the Conservation of Energy, is with Plato the end itself, and its presence the very sign of a purpose fulfilled. He sees in the revolutions of the starry heavens, in what he calls the circle of the Same, the most complete success of designing intelligence, the supreme victory of the assimilative over the differentiating power. And it is by the wayward incalculable movements of the molecules from which the four elements, fire, air, earth, and water, are built up, of these elements themselves, and of the organisms which they nourish that the reign of necessity is best represented. But in the interest of the present argument what concerns us most to notice is that in direct opposition to this theory of matter he elsewhere describes two of the four elements, fire and earth, as existing for the sole purpose of being perceived by sight and touch; while the other two, air and water, are there merely to connect those extremes by harmonious mathematical proportions.¹ In other words, matter does not, as with Berkeley, exist through perception, but in order that it may be perceived by our senses, and therefore it takes the form of fire and earth, an antithetical couple with the usual mediating links. And now comes the very significant detail to which attention is invited. Plato tells us that the heavenly bodies were composed chiefly of fire, and the sun (as would seem) entirely of that element in order that he might illuminate the whole heaven, and that by studying his revolutions the living beings to whom such knowledge is appropriate might learn arithmetic, and through arithmetic attain to the ideas of Identity and Difference. By the way, it is rather remarkable that Plato in his increasing fanaticism for logic and mathematics should completely ignore the sun's life-giving power on which he had particularly dwelt in the *Republic*. But to return: besides their bodies of fire, the sun and the other celestial orbs have souls constituted by the twofold movement that animates them, a movement of axial rotation representing the form of Identity, and a retrograde movement of revolution round the centre of the whole cosmic sphere in a circle inclined to the celestial equator,

¹ *Tim.* 31, B, *sqq.*

representing the form of Difference. The fiery body is apparently devoid of sensibility, and exists only that it may illustrate an object-lesson in natural law for intelligent beings, *i.e.* ourselves. Is it likely then that the movements which it makes manifest should be constituted or accompanied by consciousness? especially if, as there seems every reason to believe, the movements are such as could be performed without the intervention of intelligence and will.¹

To unravel this tangled skein of thought, two points must be borne in mind. The first is that, as has been already observed, Plato's object in writing the *Timæus* was not merely to explain what the world is, but also to explain how it can be known. The second is that according to the almost unanimous tradition of Greek philosophy like can only be known by like.² Plato accepted this leading, and it probably had a good deal to do with his preference for the category of identity in the construction of an intelligible universe. He had explained the heavens as a series of repetitions and imitations; he had now to bring human life under the same law, and accordingly he bends every effort towards establishing an equation between nature and man.

There does not at first sight seem to be a very striking resemblance or even analogy between the body of man and the world that he inhabits, or between his mind and the principles by which that world is moved; but our logician gets over the difficulty in the following ingenious manner. The essential part of a human being is his head, the abode of reason; the trunk and limbs are mere subsidiary appendages designed to meet the necessity for nutrition and locomotion entailed by his residence in a region of perpetual flux where the loss of old material must be continually made good by the accession of new supplies. Like him the cosmic sphere and the smaller spheres that it encloses are rational animals—indeed they have furnished the pattern on which he is constructed—but being limited to rotatory movements and not subject to waste they

¹ The same ambiguity is exhibited, but with much greater clearness, in Aristotle's cosmology, where two independent explanations are offered of the celestial motions, either of which would render the other superfluous. The one, which may be called physical, represents the quintessential matter of which the heavens are composed as naturally moving in a circle without ever stopping, whereas fire rises and earth falls until they come to rest on reaching their respective places at the circumference and centre of the sublunary sphere. The other or metaphysical explanation (adopted by Dante) is that the heavenly orbs are animated by conscious spirits which move them round in love and emulation of the eternal self-thinking thought, itself unmoved, on which all nature hangs (*De Cælo*, i., 2; *Phys.*, viii., 10; *Metaph.* xii., 7 and 8).

² The sole exception known to me is Anaxagoras, and even he, while asserting that the Nous knows things unlike itself, assumes that the nous in us knows the cosmic Nous. Prof. Taylor (*loc. cit.*) mentions the school of Heracleitus in this connexion. But Heracleitus himself certainly held that Fire is known by Fire; and as to his school, the contrary of whatever they asserted was, on their own principle, equally true.

can dispense with a locomotory, prehensile, and digestive apparatus. In short *they* are all head, and *our* heads are the heavenliest thing about us : but where are their axial and orbital revolutions ?

Plato knew that our heads do not turn ; and he must have known that when they seem to go round it is the worst possible sign for the orderly functioning of the brain ; but he finds a parallel for the circles of the Same and the Other, that is for the diurnal and periodical revolutions of the celestial spheres, in the working of a rightly ordered human reason ; and he looks to the study of astronomy as a primary means of intellectual and moral discipline in the reformed society of the future. Of course it is all a fantastic way of saying that there is a unity of composition through the whole of nature, and that the steadiness of physical law is a guide to steadiness of reasoning and conduct. Yet no one would have attacked another philosopher with more merciless ridicule had he chosen a phenomenon so suggestive of dizziness as the outward and visible sign of rational reflexion ; and the deliberate adoption of such an absurdity can be explained only by the desire to force an analogy through at all hazards. But we may well ask whether the ascription of consciousness to the world without is to be understood more literally than the ascription of rotatory movement to the world within. With respect, however, to the deification of the heavenly bodies, a practical motive comes into play, which, as Plato grew older, gained increasing ascendancy over his teaching. This was the desire to reconcile his philosophy with the popular faith ; partly no doubt in order to escape persecution, but also, and to a greater extent, because he had come to look on a purified theology as the surest sanction of social order.

What remains after allowing the largest possible discount for dialectical accommodation, for myth, for allegory, for religious edification gained at the expense of the old Ionian plain speaking, or for extreme deference to popular fanaticism, is the great thought of identity in difference, the conquering assimilation of the Same in the cosmic order with the Same in the human self, the mystical communion, already affirmed by Heracleitus and Parmenides, to be reaffirmed long afterwards by Kant and Wordsworth, between the starry heavens without and the moral law within. And on a lower or at any rate a different plane, the plane of pure science, the *Timaëus* foreshadows one of the most fertile methods of modern enquiry, never used with more searching effect than in our own day, what may be called the method of assimilation, based on the tendency of evolution to make things not more unlike but more like one another.

In tracing the outlines of this philosophy of identity one

cannot but be reminded of another *Identitäts-philosophie*, of the fragmentary system which remains as Schelling's only real contribution to the development of modern thought. For the German as for the Greek ontologist the object was to reconcile nature with man; only what the one had just glimpsed as an antithesis between knowledge and being transforms itself for the other into the profounder antithesis between subject and object. But the method by which both attempt to establish an equation between disparate quantities is substantially the same. It consists in carrying over portions of each to the other side and arranging them in parallel series until a complete analogy of structure has been effected, when the two are boldly declared to be the same, or to reflect one another. For example ('that's Schelling's way!') we may argue that in self-consciousness the subject is its own object, hence there is an identity between the two—making three with them—and these three are one. And with a little ingenuity and more good-will certain physical concepts may be so manipulated as to play the part of percipient subjects to others standing for perceived objects, while a third set represents the synthesis or 'identity' of the two. Thus the evolution of consciousness does but reflect on a higher plane what was prefigured in the evolution of inorganic matter and of unconscious life.

The substantial identity of mind with its object occupies a much less prominent place in the *Timaëus* than in the *Natur-philosophie*. But we can hardly doubt that when Plato set up the Idea of the Same as the ruling principle of cosmic being and of human reason alike he wished the two to be regarded as essentially one. The Same must everywhere be the same with itself. And this method would have the additional recommendation of giving a new meaning and sanction to his habit of conveying philosophical lessons through the vehicle of myth and allegory. For, according to his latest interpretation, Nature herself is the great allegorist and myth-maker. The consummate and eternal reality of the starry sphere repeats itself on a smaller scale through all the lower spheres, of which our earth is one; on a still smaller scale, with less definite forms and with endless self-reproduction as a substitute for their eternal duration, in the creatures of the lower world. In the *Republic* he had drawn a disparaging contrast between imitation and reality, shadow and substance. He had now learned to think of imitation as the primal realisation of psychic energy, the constraint exercised by the Same on the Other, the obedience of the Other to the Same. And perhaps he would have recognised a truer echo of his doctrine in the *répétition universelle* of Gabriel Tarde than in all the hollow declamation of Victor Cousin.

I have already drawn attention to the fact that the Idea of the Good in the *Republic* is, like the Same in the *Timaeus*, beyond existence. And the resemblance does not end there. We are told that the Idea of the Good is, like the sun, a source of life no less than of illumination, the author of being no less than of knowledge. Now this, as we have seen, is precisely the part played by the Idea of the Same, the assimilative power of the *Timaeus*. It brings order out of chaos in space, it brings knowledge out of confused sensation in consciousness. And we are told that the Good can only be approached through the study of geometry—a method not less indispensable to the apprehension of the Same as Plato conceived it, that is primarily under the form of mathematical equality.

Nevertheless the Good is not the Same. For as the analysis of the *Philebus* shows, Plato had come to think of the Good after a much more concrete and human fashion—approaching very closely to the standpoint of Aristotle's *Ethics*¹—than that under which it appears in the *Republic*. Like Existence it has passed from the position of an extreme to that of a mean. It is neither pleasure alone nor knowledge alone, but the reconciling synthesis of both, the delighted realisation of ourselves. Accordingly its metaphysical functions are now taken over by the more general conception of Identity, which by combining with Difference actualises and reveals itself as an assimilative power. It is this which at once creates the cosmos and enables us to understand it through the consciousness of its essential sameness with ourselves. But neither is the ethical aspect of the absolute Idea forgotten; for Plato significantly reminds us that God, being good, wished everything to resemble himself.²

Plato can hardly have been blind to the irreconcilable discrepancies between the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*; and there is even reason to believe that he contemplated the preparation of a new and revised edition of the earlier dialogue with the omission of the sections embodying the metaphysical theories which riper reflexion had induced him to abandon as mistaken or incomplete. For without such an assumption the references to the *Republic* in the introductory portion of the *Timaeus* can hardly be explained. Nearly the whole of the *Republic* as we now read it takes the form of a conversation originally held between Socrates and two young friends of his, Glaucon and Adeimantus, Plato's brothers, and repeated on the following day by Socrates himself to some person or persons unknown.

¹ Aristotle's sneers at the unpractical nature of Plato's ideal Good show how little the pupil can be trusted as an authority on the final teaching of the master. I have therefore been at no pains to reconcile his version of Platonism with that adopted in this chapter.

² *Tim.* 29 E.

But in the *Timaeus* no mention is made of these young men, and the conversation about the structure of the ideal state is represented as having passed between Socrates and certain other persons not named in the *Republic*, Critias, Timaeus, Hermocrates, and a fourth who is not now present. They have met again to continue the discussion; and to refresh their memories. Socrates recapitulates the conclusions reached in common on the preceding day, but with the significant omission of all reference to the long philosophical argument extending from book v., 471 C, to the end of book vii.¹ Partly on account of this omission and partly for other reasons it has been supposed by some that the summary of the *Timaeus* refers to an earlier version of the *Republic* than that now extant, written when Plato was comparatively young, and that the philosophical digression was inserted long afterwards as the fruit of his riper years. Such an explanation, however, has become completely untenable in the face of modern researches, showing that no portion of the *Republic* can be dated much earlier than Plato's fiftieth year; while the evolution of his thought, if it followed the order traced out in the present paper, subsequently reached a much higher stage than that represented by the conversation with Glaucon and Adeimantus. I submit then as a not unwarrantable alternative that the later Socrates makes no reference to this conversation because its author had in view an amended version of his great work, possibly on a new plan, and at any rate with a different set of interlocutors, who were to have reserved the subject of ontology for a separate discussion.²

V

The old age of Plato seems to have been marked by restless activity in more directions than one. He began various works

¹ As Mr. Archer-Hind observes, 'its metaphysical teaching is superseded by the more advanced ontology of the *Timaeus*' (*The Timaeus of Plato*, p. 56, note). I do not, however, understand Mr. Archer-Hind to suggest that a new edition of the *Republic* was in contemplation; and his interpretation of this 'advanced ontology' differs widely from mine.

² Prof. A. E. Taylor in the criticism of my theory of the Ideas already referred to (*Mind*, vol. xii. p. 1) says that the *Timaeus* contains 'the strongest and most emphatic declaration of the "separation" in some sense or other, of Idea and sensible thing, to be met with in the whole of the dialogues (51 B-52 A).' I suppose we are all of us agreed to the extent of holding that Plato taught the doctrine of 'separation' of 'Idea and sensible thing' 'in some sense or other'; and what is more, that Plato was quite right in teaching it. The real question is, in what sense? I say, in an ideal sense, not as independent and isolated things. And in the very passage referred to Plato, as it seems to me, only claims a separate existence as *entia rationis*, i.e., an ideal existence for the Ideas. It seems to me a strong confirmation of this view that the 'Third Man' argument of the *Parmenides* should be practically repeated in the *Timaeus* (31 A-B; cp. J. A. Stewart, *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas*, p. 71); besides the position, first taken up in this dialogue, that 'the same' only acquires real existence by combining with 'the Other'; just as 'the Good' in the *Republic* in its character of supreme principle is 'beyond existence.'

which were never finished, and projected others which were never begun. He became possessed by a devouring zeal for social reform. It seemed to him that nothing was wanting but an enlightened despot to make his ideal State a reality. According to one story, he fancied that such an instrument might be found in the younger Dionysius. If so, his expectations were speedily disappointed. As Hegel acutely observes, only a man of half measures will allow himself to be guided by another; and such a man would lack the energy needed to carry out Plato's scheme.¹ However this may be, the philosopher does not seem to have given up his idea that absolute monarchy was, after all, the government from which most good might be expected. A process of substitution which runs through his whole intellectual evolution was here exemplified for the last time. Just as in his ethical system knowledge, after having been regarded solely as the means for procuring an ulterior end, pleasure, subsequently became an end in itself; just as the interest in knowledge was superseded by a more absorbing interest in the dialectical machinery which was to facilitate its acquisition, and this again by the social re-organisation which was to make education a department of the State; so also the beneficent despotism originally invoked for the purpose of establishing an aristocracy on the new model, came at last to be regarded by Plato as itself the best form of government. Such, at least, seems to be the drift of a remarkable dialogue called the *Statesman*, which Jowett places immediately before the *Laws*. Some have denied its authenticity, and others have placed it very early in the entire series of Platonic compositions. But it contains passages of such blended wit and eloquence that no other man could have written them; and passages so destitute of life that they could only have been written when his system had stiffened into mathematical pedantry and scholastic routine. Moreover, it seems distinctly to anticipate the scheme of detailed legislation which Plato spent his last years in elaborating. After covering with ridicule the notion that a truly competent ruler should ever be hampered by written enactments, the principal spokesman acknowledges that, in the absence of such a ruler, a definite and unalterable code offers the best guarantees for political stability.

This code Plato set himself to construct in his last and longest work, the *Laws*. Less than half of that dialogue, however, is occupied with the details of legislation. The remaining portions deal with the familiar topics of morality, religion, science, and education. The first book propounds a very curious theory of asceticism, which has not, I believe, been taken up by any subsequent moralist. On the principle of *in vino veritas*

¹ *Gesch. d. Ph.*, vol. ii., p. 175.

Plato proposes that drunkenness should be systematically employed for the purpose of testing self-control. True temperance is not abstinence, but the power of resisting temptation ; and we can best discover to what extent any man possesses that power by surprising him when off his guard. If he should be proof against seductive influences even when in his cups, we shall be doubly sure of his constancy at other times. Jowett rather maliciously suggests that a personal proclivity may have inspired this extraordinary apology for hard drinking. Were it so, we should be reminded of the successive revelations by which indulgences of another kind were permitted to Mohammed, and of the one case in which divorce was sanctioned by Auguste Comte. We should also remember that the Christian Puritanism to which Plato approached so near has sometimes been singularly lenient to this disgraceful vice. But perhaps a higher order of considerations will help us to a better understanding of the paradox. Plato was averse from rejecting any tendency of his age that could possibly be turned to account in his philosophy. Hence, as we have seen, the use which he makes of love, even under its most unlawful forms, in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Now, it would appear, from our scanty sources of information, that social festivities, always very popular at Athens, had become the chief interest in life about the time when Plato was composing his *Laws*. According to one graceful legend, the philosopher himself breathed his last at a marriage-feast. It may, therefore, have occurred to him that the prevalent tendency could, like the amorous passions of a former generation, be utilised for moral training and made subservient to the very cause with which, at first sight, it seemed to conflict.

The concessions to common sense and to contemporary schools of thought, already pointed out in those dialogues which we suppose to have been written after the *Republic*, are still more conspicuous in the *Laws*. I do not mean merely the project of a political constitution avowedly offered as the best possible in existing circumstances, though not the best absolutely ; I mean that there is throughout a desire to present philosophy from its most intelligible, practical, and popular side. The extremely rigorous standard of sexual morality (p. 838) seems, indeed, more akin to modern than to ancient notions, but it was in all probability borrowed from the naturalistic school of ethics, the forerunner of Stoicism ; for not only is there a direct appeal to nature's teaching in that connexion ; but throughout the entire work the terms 'nature' and 'naturally' occur with greater frequency, I believe, than in all the rest of Plato's writings put together.¹ When, on the other hand, it is asserted

¹ See note at end of this chapter.

that men can be governed by no other motive than pleasure (p. 663, B), we seem to see in this declaration a concession to the Cyrenaic school, as well as a return to the forsaken standpoint of the *Protagoras*. The increasing influence of Pythagoreanism is shown by the exaggerated importance attributed to exact numerical determinations. The theory of Ideas is, as Jowett observes, entirely absent, its place being taken by the distinction between mind and matter.¹

The political constitution and code of laws recommended by Plato to his new city are adapted to a great extent from the older legislation of Athens. As such they have supplied the historians of ancient jurisprudence with some valuable indications. But from a philosophic point of view the general impression produced is wearisome and even offensive. A universal system of espionage is established, and the odious trade of informer receives ample encouragement. Worst of all, it is proposed, in the true spirit of Athenian intolerance, to uphold religious orthodoxy by persecuting laws. Plato had actually come to think that disagreement with the vulgar theology was a folly and a crime. One passage may be quoted as a warning to those who would set early associations to do the work of reason; and who would overbear new truths by a method which at one time might have been used with fatal effect against their own opinions:—

Who can be calm when he is called upon to prove the existence of the gods? Who can avoid hating and abhorring the men who are and have been the cause of this argument? I speak of those who will not believe the words which they have heard as babes and sucklings from their mothers and nurses, repeated by them both in jest and earnest like charms; who have also heard and seen their parents offering up sacrifices and prayers—sights and sounds delightful to children—sacrificing, I say, in the most earnest manner on behalf of them and of themselves, and with eager interest talking to the gods and beseeching them as though they were firmly convinced of their existence; who likewise see and hear the genuflexions and prostrations which are made by Hellenes and barbarians to the rising and setting sun and moon, in all the various turns of good and evil fortune, not as if they thought that there were no gods, but as if there could be no doubt of their existence, and no suspicion of their non-existence; when men, knowing all these things, despise them on no real grounds, as would be admitted by all who have any particle of intelligence, and when they force us to say what we are now saying, how can any one in gentle terms remonstrate with the like of them, when he has to begin by proving to them the very existence of the gods?²

¹ Teichmüller advances the startling theory that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was published before the completion of the *Laws*, and that Plato took the opportunity thus offered him for replying to the criticisms of his former pupil. (*Lit. Fehden*, pp. 194-226.)

² *Legg.*, 887-8. Jowett, vol. v., p. 456.

Let it be remembered that the gods of whom Plato is speaking are the sun, moon, and stars; that the atheists whom he denounces only taught what we have long known to be true, which is that those luminaries are no more divine, no more animated, no more capable of accepting our sacrifices or responding to our cries than is the earth on which we tread; and that he attempts to prove the contrary by arguments which, even if they were not inconsistent with all that we know about mechanics, would still be utterly inadequate to the purpose for which they are employed.

Supposing the atheist to be an entirely moral man, he is, on conviction, to be imprisoned for five years or more, during which period he is to be constantly lectured by a magistrate on the sinfulness of his unbelief; if at the end of that period he comes to a proper frame of mind he is to be released, but in case of relapse is to be put to death. The vicious atheist or other heretic receives what, according to our ideas, is a lighter punishment, imprisonment in chains for life. It seems to be expected that he will not long survive such treatment. Should a citizen be convicted of practising private forms of devotion in his own house or elsewhere, he is to be executed without a chance of repenting. Those who believe that the gods can be propitiated by prayer and sacrifice are to be punished, like the wicked infidels, by perpetual imprisonment in chains.

To quote Grote's admirable summary:—

'The lawgiver is the supreme and exclusive authority, spiritual as well as secular. No dissenters from the orthodoxy prescribed by him are admitted. Those who believe more than he does, and those who believe less, however blameless their conduct, are condemned alike to pass through a long solitary imprisonment to execution. Not only the speculations of enquiring individual reason, but also the spontaneous inspirations of religious disquietude or terror, are suppressed and punished.' ¹

I know not whether the atrocity of this religious legislation is palliated or aggravated by the fact that the legislator himself had probably no theological belief.

Turning back from the melancholy decline of a great genius to the splendour of its meridian prime, let us conclude with a brief recapitulation of the achievements which entitle Plato to rank as the greatest of all philosophers in thought and genius, as Socrates was the greatest in character and Aristotle in relative mastery of knowledge. He extended the philosophy of mind until it embraced not only ethics and dialectics but also the study of politics, of religion, of social science, of fine art, of economy, of language, and of education. In other words,

¹ *Plato and the other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. iv., p. 379. *Leges*, 907, E, *sqq.*

he showed how ideas could be applied to life on the most comprehensive scale. Further, he saw that the study of mind, to be complete, necessitates a knowledge of physical phenomena and of the realities which underlie them ; accordingly, he made a return on the objective speculations which had been temporarily abandoned, thus mediating between Socrates and early Greek thought ; while on the other hand by his theory of classification he mediated between Socrates and Aristotle. He based physical science on mathematics, thus establishing a method of research and of education which has continued in operation ever since. He sketched the outlines of a new religion in which morality was to be substituted for ritualism, and intelligent imitation of God for blind obedience to his will ; a religion of monotheism, of humanity, of purity, and of immortal life. And he embodied all these lessons in a series of compositions distinguished by such beauty of form that their literary excellence alone would entitle them to rank among the greatest masterpieces that the world has ever seen. He took the recently-created instrument of prose style and at once raised it to the highest pitch of excellence that it has ever attained. Finding the new art already distorted by false taste and overlaid with meretricious decoration, he cleansed and regenerated it in that primal fount of intellectual life, that richest, deepest, purest source of joy, the conversation of enquiring spirits with one another when they have awakened to the desire for truth and have not learned to despair of its attainment. Thus it was that the philosopher's mastery of expression gave added emphasis to his protest against those who made style a substitute for knowledge, or, by a worse corruption, perverted it into an instrument of profitable wrong. They moved along the surface in a confused world of words, of sensations, and of animal desires ; he penetrated through all those dumb images and blind instincts, to the central verity and supreme end which alone can inform them with meaning, consistency, permanence, and value. To conclude : Plato belonged to that nobly practical school of idealists who master all the details of reality before attempting its reformation, and who accomplish their great designs by enlisting and reorganising whatever spontaneous forces are already working in the same direction ; but the fertility of whose own suggestions it needs more than one millennium to exhaust. There is nothing in heaven or earth that was not dreamt of in his philosophy ; some of his dreams have already come true ; others still await their fulfilment ; and even those which are irreconcilable with the demands of experience will continue to be studied with the interest attaching to every generous and daring adventure, in the spiritual no less than in the secular order of existence.

NOTE ON THE IDEA OF NATURE IN PLATO

The idea of nature has, in Plato, a somewhat wider extension than in modern language or in modern philosophy. Like us, he talks about the nature of particular things and persons, and about nature as a whole, usually in the sense of *natura naturata*, but sometimes also, though rarely, as *natura naturans* (*Phaedrus*, 240, B; *Gorgias*, 483, D; *Soph.* 265, C). Like us, he distinguishes between nature as an objective reality on the one hand and our subjective opinions on the other (*Laws*, vii. 822, B). Like us also, he sets up nature as an objective standard to which our actions and our works, our language and our reasonings should be conformed, saying φύσει or κατὰ φύσιν where we say natural or naturally. No examples need at present be given of his procedure in this respect, as it will form the principal topic of the following discussion, being in fact a primary though neglected element of interest in Plato's philosophy as connected with the general movement of Greek thought. But the sense of supreme and absolute reality belongs in a much higher degree to the Platonic φύσις than to the nature of modern or even of Aristotelian philosophy. It transcends the limits of space and time and embraces the necessities of ideal existence. Had Plato known and accepted Hegel's Logic, he would have said that its categories existed ἐν τῇ φύσει before they were worked out by Hegel, and that the order of their succession was their order κατὰ φύσιν.

In the first of the meanings above specified, that is as the constitution of a particular thing, φύσις is a word of ancient and wide-spread occurrence in Greek literature, even going back to late Homeric times (*Od.* κ. 303). In the more general senses it was a creation of the Ionian philosophy, and was at first apparently not very familiar to Plato himself. The idea of nature as a universal order or norm is utterly absent from the *Euthyphro*, *Apologia*, *Crito*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Ion*, and *Hippias Minor*.¹ In the *Lysis* it appears twice, as the physical universe (214 B), and in reference to human beings as something that creates a bond of friendship between them, a community of nature (222 A). Now these being by general consent the group of dialogues which most faithfully represent the Socratic spirit, it may, I think, be fairly inferred that Socrates had little or nothing to say about nature as a moral guide or otherwise. Not φύσις but τέχνη was his watchword. His analogies were borrowed not from the processes of nature but from the industrial arts. His dialectic was modelled not on the immanent reason of things but on the practice of the Athenian law-courts. And this inference receives support from the further observation that the idea of nature is also absent from what seem to be the most genuinely Socratic passages in Xenophon's writings, although not from other passages that seem to betray the influence of another philosophy.

What that other was we learn first of all from the *Protagoras* of Plato. This dialogue is almost exclusively occupied with an enquiry into the origin and meaning of moral goodness, suggested in the first instance by the pretensions of the Sophist Protagoras who came forward as a teacher of virtue. It would seem that according to the general opinion of his contemporaries the promise was delusive, involving as it did the paradoxical assumption that by nature (φύσει) there are no virtues, the qualities so called being mere creatures of convention (νόμος). As against this theory it was urged that men are 'naturally' just and brave and temperate, or 'naturally' the reverse: no amount of teaching can turn a born rascal into a good man. We owe

¹ φύσει τινί, *Ap.* I C, means an individual endowment, so does ψυχὴν εἰς πεφυκώς in *Charm.* 154 D, and πρὸς σωφροσύνην ἱκανῶς πέφυκας, *ib.* 158 B; while τὸ διὰ πάντων περὶ ἀνδρείας πεφυκός, *Laches*, 192 B, means of course the special nature of courage.

this interesting criticism not to Plato but to a much better representative of average Greek opinion, the rhetorician Isocrates (*De Permutatione*, 274).

But it serves to elucidate and bring out in stronger relief an argument of the Platonic Protagoras to the effect that men do not really think that virtue comes by nature, or they would not be angry with those who do wrong and admonish and punish them any more than they are angry with those who are deficient in any other natural gift (p. 323, D and E). Of course a more developed analysis would have distinguished between that part of our moral character which is amenable to control and that which is innate and unalterable. But the interesting thing is that Protagoras or his hearers showed a similar inability to discriminate between the nature of the individual as such and nature as an objective reality. According to his view, we are told, the just had no existence in itself but was a creation of human law. We will to be just or unjust, and therefore we will the just or the unjust to be. In other words, the distinction is arbitrary and changeable. This is no doubt a sophism, but an unconscious one, and it had the merit of suggesting an eminently philosophical theory of morality, which if not entirely true at least contains a large element of truth. In the speech put into his mouth by Plato and probably representing his actual point of view Protagoras shows that virtue is a necessity of the social state, having for its sanctions law, domestic discipline, and public opinion. He also points out that increasing civilisation is accompanied by moral progress, and that even the worst members of Athenian society were after all an improvement on the ordinary savage (327 D).

It is, I think, highly probable that when Protagoras declared man to be the measure of existence and of non-existence he only meant to assert in a striking and paradoxical manner the perfectly tenable proposition that moral distinctions were made by mankind for their own benefit, and that any particular rule of conduct should cease to exist when it ceases to be beneficial. For had he really meant that one man's opinions were as true as another's even when the two directly contradicted one another, it seems incredible that Isocrates when he was enumerating the most extravagant theses of the Sophists should have left this aphorism unnoticed while denouncing the very limited application of it which consists in the negation of natural morality. And Plato himself tells us that the 'homo mensura' was held in this restricted sense by some who did not go quite so far as Protagoras.

By his negation of natural justice (in the sense of *Naturrecht*), by his reference to mere social utility as the moral standard, by his consequent reduction of right and wrong to a conventional, relative, and variable distinction, Protagoras seems to have placed himself in opposition not only to popular prejudice but also to a well-marked contemporary school of thought. As represented by Plato he appears in an attitude of scarcely disguised hostility towards another sophist, Hippias; and the hostility is not merely the professional jealousy felt by one paid teacher towards another: it extends to the method of their teaching itself. We find Hippias surrounded by a crowd of disciples who are questioning him about physics and astronomy; and a little while afterwards we hear Protagoras scornfully declaring, with a glance at his rival, that these topics formed no part of the liberal education which he undertook to give, and which related only to the conduct of private and public life (*Protag.* 315 C and 318 E). Now Hippias was, no less than Protagoras, a moralist; and it is permissible to conjecture that his lessons in physics were, like those of the Stoics afterwards, meant as a preparation for his morality. In this same dialogue Plato puts into his mouth a distinction clearly meant to be characteristic, between νόμος and φύσις, law or convention and nature, with a manifest preference for the latter. 'I consider,' says he, 'that all of us here present are kinsmen, intimates and fellow-citizens, by nature and not by law; for by nature like is akin to like, whereas

law is a tyrant over men, and forces them to do many things against nature. Now it is disgraceful that we who know the nature of things . . . should wrangle together like the lowest of mankind' (337 C—D).

In a conversation with Socrates reported by Xenophon—or invented, it does not greatly matter which—this same Hippias refuses to accept the law of the land as a standard of right, because the laws are constantly being changed (*Memorab.* iv. 4, 14). At the same time he admits that the laws common to all countries are good (*ib.* 19). Here we have the Jus Gentium of Roman Law, as in the passage from Plato we had something like its Jus Naturale, with a tendency, shown also by the Roman jurists, to pass from the one to the other. The Roman idea was inspired by Stoicism, which again had its root in Cynicism. Now we are told that Diogenes the Cynic opposed nature to law, preferring the former (Laert. *Diog.*, vii., 11, 38); and that Antisthenes, the founder of the sect, taught that the wise man should regulate himself not by the established laws but by the law of virtue (*ib.* 11); and we know on the authority of Xenophon that Antisthenes took lessons from Hippias (*Symp.* iv. 62). Finally, whether or not we can trust the statement of Suidas that ἀνδρεία was the declared ideal of Hippias, it is evident from the satirical compliments in Plato's *Hippias Minor* on the versatility which enabled the sophist to manufacture for himself every article of clothing and every ornament he wore, that in respect to material wants he was either self-sufficient or was ambitious of seeming to be so. Now this sort of self-sufficiency, this refusal to profit by the resources of civilisation, is a form of the return to nature, an emulation of the dexterity attributed to savages, and as such was much commended throughout the eighteenth century in circles where nature was the watchword.

We have every reason to believe that Plato agreed with the theory which he puts into the mouth of Protagoras, so far as it goes. But he objected to it as unproved and incomplete. Accordingly in the sequel of the dialogue he endeavours to supply both a proof and a completion. His method may be summarised somewhat in this style.

Why does the community exercise on its members this unceasing direction and control of which Protagoras speaks? Because it wants to secure for itself the greatest possible amount of pleasure and the least possible amount of pain. And why do individuals obey the laws imposed by the community? Because those laws are sanctioned by pleasure and pain. Thus Plato seems to suggest that virtue does after all exist by nature as well as by law; and just because it so exists as an objective fact it can be taught like any other fact independent of ourselves. It lay in the Socratic tradition to harmonise nature and law instead of setting them in opposition to one another; for Xenophon also makes his master defend civil law against Hippias as a standard of justice on the ground that its dictates agree with the inspirations of nature; and here at least Xenophon cannot be writing from a cynical point of view, for the Cynics emphasised the opposition that he smooths down.

The question whether virtue could be taught and the question whether nature and law agreed or differed in their demands on conduct rapidly widened under Plato's hands into the more general problem of the relation between the known object and the feeling, knowing subject. As such we find it discussed in the *Meno*, which carries on the argument begun in the *Protagoras*, but with the profounder insight that Plato had meanwhile acquired from a study of geometry. The demonstrations of that science are worked out *a priori* by human reason and yet they reveal to us the nature of things in themselves. He explains this by the kinship of all nature represented under the mythical veil of a previous existence of the soul when it acquired by direct observation the knowledge that is now recalled by reflection. In the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* this suggestion is worked out in the first sketch of a theory according to which the supreme

ideals of conduct have their prototypes in nature—not necessarily what we call nature, the world contained in space and time, but the world of logical reality. But Plato never absents himself long from concrete and visible nature; and in his *Phaedrus* it is just of this nature that he warmly recommends the study as the best possible preparation for an orator, pointing to the example of Pericles, who had learned the grand style of oratory through physical studies pursued under the direction of Anaxagoras (269 *sqq.*).

The expressions *κατὰ φύσιν* and *πὰρὰ φύσιν* are not common in Greek literature before or contemporary with Plato. I cannot find the former in Xenophon at all and the latter only once (*Hiero*, 22). Isocrates has *κατὰ φύσιν* once in a very late work (*De Permut.* 285), and *παρὰ τὴν φύσιν* once in a particular sense (*Nic.* 31). With Plato their more frequent use is, I think, a mark of increasing lateness. *Κατὰ φύσιν* occurs indeed seven times in the *Gorgias*, a middle dialogue, and *παρα φύσιν* twice. But if instead of counting the words themselves we count their uses the nine times reduce themselves to once, as it is solely to characterise the right of the stronger as according to nature, and to stigmatise laws for the protection of the weak as against nature that they come up. So in the *Republic* while the actual occurrences are ten (all in books iv.—v.) we have, discounting repetitions, at most two uses (429 A and 444 D). The *Menexenus* has *κατὰ φύσιν* once in the sense of a natural order in the oration, corresponding to the actual order of the events related (237 A). The *Theaetetus* has *κατὰ φύσιν* once, but only in a particular sense (189 D). *Παρὰ φύσιν* occurs three times, counting as one, in the *Parmenides*, to express the impossibility of combining mutually exclusive attributes in the same notion (153 B, *sqq.*), and *κατὰ φύσιν* once, in reference to the essential nature of concrete things (158 E). The *Sophistes* has *κατὰ φύσιν* once in the sense of logical necessity (256 C); as also the *Politicus* (283 D), where moreover we find *ἡ ἀληθὴς κατὰ φύσιν οἶσα πολιτικὴ* in the sense of statesmanship directed by the laws of nature (308 D); *ἕθεσι θρεφθεῖσι κατὰ φύσιν* (310 A) is rather ambiguous: it may mean educated in accordance with their own nature, or with the laws of nature generally. Ranked according to this test the *Cratylus*, notwithstanding its fresh and playful tone, must count as a late dialogue. Here *κατὰ φύσιν* and *παρὰ φύσιν* occur altogether five times, reducible to three distinct applications. The operations of art when performed in obedience to the conditions of its materials are said to be done *κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν φύσιν*; monstrous births, as of a calf from a horse, are *παρὰ φύσιν*; and for names to be imposed on objects according to a law of analogy or similitude is *κατὰ φύσιν τεθῆναι* (387 A, 393 C and 395 D). Note that *ἡ πέφυκε* is used synonymously with *κατὰ φύσιν* (387 B), just as in the *Timaeus*—an admittedly late dialogue (81 E). The *Philæbus* is unquestionably late; here the occurrences are seven and the distinct usages five in number (22 B, 27 A, 32 A, 32 B, and 50 E). A perceptible advance towards Stoicism may be found in the very pointed distinction drawn between ‘natural pains’ (*φύσει ἀλγηδόνες*) and those superinduced by reflection (*λογισμός*, 52 A). As might perhaps have been anticipated from its subject matter *κατὰ φύσιν* and *παρὰ φύσιν* are relatively more frequent in the *Timaeus* than in any other Platonic dialogue, the actual occurrences being twenty-one, reducible to nine after all pleonasm and repetitions have been struck out. Even here the logical sense is prominent (28 B, 41 C, and 47 C). In other instances ‘natural’ implies the unimpeded action of a mechanism designed for certain ends (44 B and 82 B). The ‘laws of nature’ (*φύσεως νόμοι*) do not, as with us, imply invariable relations but normal or healthy conditions (83 E). To assimilate the state of the knowing subject to that of the known universe is spoken of as being either itself the divinely preappointed end of man, or else an indispensable condition for its attainment; and such an assimilation is ‘in accordance with man’s original nature’ (90 D).

We now come to the most interesting part of this whole investigation,

the idea of nature as presented in Plato's *Laws*. Applying our external test we find that *κατὰ φύσιν* and *παρὰ φύσιν* occur in this work forty-seven times, and after making the usual deductions, thirty-six times. Perhaps seven of these should be struck off as implying a direct reference to the *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, and the *Cratylus* (690 B, 714 C, 757 D, 816 B, 846 D, 890 A, 896 C); and one more as the often repeated commonplace that things naturally seek their like (773 B). But even so the *Laws* will be found to employ this phrase more frequently than all the other dialogues put together. And on going below the surface we find that the external difference corresponds to a real change in the ethical point of view. At the very outset what we still call unnatural vice is condemned as such—an altogether new departure in Plato, vividly contrasting with the tolerant tone of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*—while the so-called Sophistic opposition between nature and at least some laws is clearly implied, and made to tell in favour of the higher morality which is natural (636 *sqq.*). At a later stage of the discussion the same subject is taken up and analysed in all its bearings with a mastery that leaves nothing to be desired (836 *sqq.*). Here we find the example of the lower animals appealed to in the naturalistic style; and the very words 'following nature' are used as they were afterwards used by the Stoics (636 B). But not only does Plato prohibit unnatural love; he would if possible limit sexual intercourse to the married state, justifying both rules on the naturalistic ground that the gratification of sexual appetite has for its end the perpetuation of the race, an end defeated by wasting the generative power on unfruitful soil, or wherever one would not wish offspring to be raised (838 E—839 A). He also adduces the utilitarian argument that such a limitation would be a wholesome restraint on the mischievous excesses of passion, and that conjugal fidelity would make husbands much more affectionate and intimate with their wives. This last consideration recalls the domestic lessons of Xenophon's *Economics*, which is itself tinged with the naturalistic spirit.¹ Note also the way in which 'birds and many other animals' are offered to the citizens as an example of chastity and conjugal fidelity which it would be shameful to fall short of (840 D).

Here as in the *Protagoras*, Plato advocates temperance on the ground that it produces an excess of pleasurable over painful feeling (734 A); but since writing the *Protagoras* he has learned, as the *Philèbus* and *Timæus* show, to interpret pleasure as an index of a healthy and normal condition, so that to accept it as a guide is now, in his opinion, more clearly equivalent to placing oneself under the guidance of nature; and this is why he now ventures to avow that 'no one if he can help it will allow himself to be persuaded to do what is followed by more pain than pleasure' (663 B); and to declare on another occasion, in language as strong as Bentham's, that 'pleasures and pains and desires are by nature the most human thing of all, and on them every mortal necessarily hangs and depends' (732 E).²

Justice, the most important of all the virtues, is also the most difficult to provide with a natural sanction. Plato seems to have felt the difficulty more in his later years than in his prime. His language, so confident and triumphant in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, becomes in the *Laws* confused, tortuous, obscure.

¹ According to Xenophon agriculture teaches justice, as the yield of the land is proportioned to the labour expended on it (*Oecon.* v. 12). The queen bee is held up as a model of good house-keeping (vii. 32), painting the face condemned as deceitful and by implication as unnatural (x. 5-7).

² Compare Bentham's words: 'Nature has placed mankind under the guidance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. . . . On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects are fastened to their throne' (*Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chap. i.).

Fortunately our business is less to defend than to analyse the reasoning it covers. Like other moralists at a loss he invokes the religious sanction. God and the gods are often in his mouth. But with him the divine is never far removed from the natural. When Homer correctly reports the more primitive conditions of society he speaks *κατὰ θεόν πως καὶ κατὰ φ.* (682 A). 'God conducts the courses of the world in an unbroken order (*ἐνθείῳ*) according to nature, and justice follows him to take vengeance on those who forsake the divine law' (716 A). The question then arises, how do we know when we are following God? To which Plato replies that among those who observe moderation (*ὄντι μετρίῳ*) like loves like—a favourite principle of naturalism. And he then goes on to say that God is the best measure of all things, far more so than man. The reference is of course to Protagoras. But have we not here a confirmation of the suggestion that 'Homo Mensura' was a canon set up in opposition to another canon, implied or expressed, viz. 'Natura Mensura'? At any rate the transition, verbal rather than logical, from *μέτριος* to *μέτρον* seems to imply that the divine standard offered for human imitation is the fixed order of nature, the abiding of all physical objects and processes within certain constant and irremovable limits.

We now come to something like the autonomy of the Practical Reason. Man as a part of nature must be subject to law, and, being by virtue of his intelligence akin to the animating spirit of nature, he must prescribe that law to himself and obey it not with pain but with pleasure—naturally in fact. Therefore every law should be provided with a preamble setting forth its reasonableness, in order that the citizens may if possible yield to persuasion rather than to force. In this connexion we come across the curious remark that no legislator has ever introduced his laws with a preamble 'as if by nature there was no such thing,' whereas, according to Plato, there is (722 E). For just as the empiric learns medicine by the traditional rules of the healing art and not 'according to nature,' or in more modern phraseology by authority instead of by reason, and prescribes remedies to his patients after the same servile method, whereas the scientific physician takes the patient and his friends into his confidence, explaining both the disease and the cure as he goes along 'according to nature'—the only proper treatment for freemen—so should it be with the prescriptions of the legislator (720 B *sqq.*). It seems then that, so far as all existing codes went, Plato would agree perfectly with Hippias in calling law a tyrant, and in opposing it as such to nature, although for the future he would put an end to their antagonism by the reconciling dialectic method of Socrates. Nor is this all. Throughout the discussion there is a marked association between the three notions nature, reason, and freedom, nay even a tendency to treat them as interchangeable. The consequence would soon suggest itself that all rational beings, *i.e.*, all men are by nature free. But Plato never alludes to such a possible application of his principles; and in this very dialogue he speaks with peculiar harshness of slaves, declaring that a master should never speak to them except to give orders (777 E). We may infer that the natural right to freedom proclaimed by Alcidas in Plato's lifetime had not come to Plato's ears.

Returning to justice, with Plato as with Aristotle it falls under the two heads of distribution and retribution. As in the *Republic*, honour and power must be allotted according to the natural principle of proportionate equality, the most meritorious getting the largest share (757). With regard to private property Plato finds himself in a difficulty. Theoretically he is a communist, and a much more advanced communist than when he wrote the *Republic*. Then only a small minority of citizens, the governing and military caste, were forbidden to have private property and families of their own. Now communism of the most absolute description, including women, children and all useful things (*χρήματα ἐύπαντα*), is extolled as the ideally best arrangement for the State. Even those parts which are by nature the property of

each (τὰ φύσει ἴδια), the limbs, senses, and thoughts, should so far as possible be nationalised and entirely devoted to the service of the community (739 C). It would seem then that Plato by deliberately denying the sanctity of what he admits to be the natural right of a man to his own person, places his communism on a socialist rather than on a naturalist foundation; and that so far he remains true to the method of the *Republic*, while driving its consequences to an extreme. Nevertheless he may be unconsciously obeying a naturalistic impulse. The question deserves investigation.

I cannot agree with those who think that communism as a theoretical scheme was proposed for the first time in the *Republic*. The limitations imposed on it in that dialogue give me the impression of a highly artificial compromise between a very much more revolutionary project and the conditions of the Greek state as it actually existed. We know from the *Ecclesiazusae* of Aristophanes that, early in the fourth century communistic theories were already sufficiently prevalent to be chosen as a subject for satire on the comic stage; and criticism has shown that no part of the *Republic* was written when this play appeared. Again, Plato first mentions the community of wives as a postulate so self-evident that it needs no explanation or defence (*Rep.* 424, A), and only develops it at a later stage of the discussion. This looks as if the idea was not entirely new to his audience. To what school of thought then should communism be credited? One thinks first of the Pythagoreans; but at this time they were little known at Athens. Protagoras and the Conventionalists must have been utterly opposed to such a daring innovation on established practices, such a return to the savage life they abhorred. Socrates would have discussed the proposal with perfect good temper, but there is no reason to believe that he would have accepted it. There remain the Naturalists, or Physiocrats as I have called them; and in fact the general opinion among scholars seems to be that Antisthenes was the first communist, although the direct evidence on which they rely is very trifling. Perhaps this somewhat equivocal honour belongs to Hippias, the real founder of naturalism. He was always trying to say something new (Xenophon, *Mem.* iv., 4, 7); he tried to dispense with the division of labour which is most intimately associated with private property; and he lectured at Sparta, afterwards a favourite hunting ground of communist philosophers. The influence of women may have had something to do with the new theories. According to Aristophanes their vote at Athens would have been thrown solid for communism. Long afterwards the Roman ladies in the time of Epictëtus were fond of reading Plato's *Republic* because it advocated a community of wives (Epict. *fragm.* 53). Now there is some evidence of feminism in the naturalistic school. Antisthenes held that virtue was the same for men as for women (Laert. *Diog.* vi., 1, 12), in direct opposition to Gorgias and Thucydides who both belonged to the humanistic school. Both the *Economics* and the *Symposium* of Xenophon have a naturalistic colouring, and both show the strongest interest in women. The high-born Hipparchia conceived an irresistible passion for the Cynic philosopher Crates and insisted on marrying him. Perhaps his teaching contained some compliments to her sex. Here also Plato took a middle course. He placed women far below men, but wished that whatever abilities they had should be utilised for the service of the state.

It seems likely then that Plato's communism was originally suggested by the physiocratic philosophy, and that his more thoroughgoing acceptance of the principle in the *Laws* points to an increasing ascendancy of the naturalistic point of view as he grew older.

Communism, however, being for the time impracticable, Plato falls back on an equal division of the land with only a passing reference to natural equity (741 A). He would have laws to prevent the increase or diminution of private property from going beyond a certain limit; but here, as in most parts of the dialogue, he is rather working on the lines of Dorian custom

than developing a purely philosophical speculation. But when the institution of private property has once been recognised and established he incidentally enunciates a rule for its protection of the utmost significance and suggestiveness. 'May no one,' he says, 'touch, as far as possible, anything of mine; and may I do the same with regard to the things of others' (913 A). The golden rule of Jesus Christ has of course been quoted in illustration of this maxim; but a better parallel presents itself in the *Nicomaches* of Plato's contemporary, Isocrates, a declamation certainly written some years before the publication of the *Laws*. There the speaker insists that the same fidelity should be given to wives that is exacted from them (40); that officials should treat their subordinates as they wish themselves to be treated by the King (49); and finally, that no citizen should do to others what would make him angry were it done to himself (61). I cannot think that Isocrates, a great master of words, but certainly not an original genius, was the first to enunciate this principle; yet no Greek can be shown to have said as much before him, for what Diogenes reports of Thales is quite untrustworthy. In treating of Socrates I have suggested that it began with his dialectic; but how could we then explain its entire absence from Xenophon and from the earlier Platonic dialogues? A number of sayings attributed to Antisthenes are extant, but the golden rule does not appear among them. There remain the great Sophists, very much of whose teaching has been lost. From which of these is Isocrates most likely to have learned his ethics? Not from Protagoras and Gorgias whom he scouts as paradox-mongers, but either from Prodicus or better still from Hippias whose widow he married. If so, Plato probably drew from the same source, and we have one more note of naturalism in the *Laws*.

Passing to retributive justice, we find Plato repeating as his own the same wise and humane theory of punishment that on a former occasion he put into the mouth of Protagoras. Offenders are not to suffer because they have done wrong, for what is done cannot be undone, but as a warning to themselves and to others (934 A, cp. *Protag.*, 324 A, *sqq.*). Now the naturalistic theory of punishment is that a man should suffer what he has done; and we find it enunciated as such by Plato in so many words elsewhere (870 E). But observe the difference he makes in his application of the two theories. Punishment as a utilitarian expedient for the prevention of wrong-doing is for this life, for the kingdom of Nomos; punishment as a strict retaliation on the offender is reserved for a future life, for the kingdom of absolute and eternal reality, which is what Plato calls nature in the fullest sense of the word.

Truth is a virtue which in the earlier dialogues had no absolute value, being entirely subordinated to political utility. In the *Laws* it is extolled as the beginning of every good thing both for gods and men (730 B); and lying is stigmatised as something 'by nature' unjust and shameful (934 E). This is exactly what one would expect a naturalistic moralist to say; for although lying is in a sense natural enough to human beings, it is against nature in the sense of creating a discord between thoughts and things. Accordingly we find the Prodicus of Plato distinguishing between the approval that is given unfeignedly with the soul and the praise often given falsely in words. The Prodicus of Xenophon makes Virtue say that she will tell truly how things actually are as the gods (*i.e.* nature) have disposed them. Hippias denounced calumny—a particular form of falsehood—observing that though worse than theft it was left unpunished by the laws. (Plutarch, *Fragm.* xxiv. 4.) According to Plato the same Sophist—it seems a strange name to call him in this connexion—exalted Achilles above Odysseus because he was straightforward and truthful (364 E). Antisthenes, Diogenes, and Crates agreed with Prodicus in severely condemning flattery (Stobaeus, *Floril.* xiv. 14, 16, 17, 19). On this point the evidence is complete and convincing.

It is not only in pure ethics that the author of the *Laws* makes large concessions to naturalism but also in education. When Protagoras, in the dialogue called after him, sneers at Hippias for teaching young men arithmetic and astronomy, he seems to have the full sympathy of Plato himself, to judge by the ironical account of that Sophist's lecture (315 C). But arithmetic and astronomy are now prescribed as indispensable parts of every citizen's education 'agreeably to the order of nature' (818 C-E), and not without reference to the ethical value of mathematics (741 A). Education is moreover to be made as much of an amusing game as possible—quite in the spirit of Rousseau (819 B).

In the *Protagoras* savages are spoken of in contrast with civilised men as lawless, violent, and wicked. It may be presumed that Plato meant to express his concurrence in that sweeping condemnation; for in the *Republic* he calls a community which possesses only the necessities of life 'a city of pigs' (372 D), as some think, in reference to the ideal of Antisthenes. But in the *Laws* the condition of primitive man is described as a sort of golden age, and the people as simple, brave, temperate, and just (679 E), again very much in the style of Rousseau or of the Stoics. Nowhere else is the naturalistic note more clearly sounded. It is true that Plato, unlike Hippias, still holds fast to the division of labour and the specialisation of ability (847 D); but in this he only shows his more perfect knowledge of what nature teaches.

When astronomers find that the movements of some great and distant planet are accelerated or retarded to an extent that cannot be accounted for by its relations to the other known bodies of the system, they try to explain the perturbations by referring them to the attraction of another planet which as yet they cannot see. As regards the changes in Plato's ethical opinions we are nearly but not quite in this position. We know that by the side of the Academy there existed other schools; but the few direct means of observation at our disposal afford a very imperfect notion of their magnitudes and of their orbits. Only by the reaction of Plato's vast and luminous intellect are we enabled to determine roughly the constitution and history of at least one among those schools. I call the school in question physiocratic because it founded moral discipline on the study of nature and of man as a part of nature. It rejected pleasure when cultivated to excess, it rejected false shows, it strove to reform what was morbid or unjust in Hellenic customs and laws by an appeal to nature, while exalting true intellectual education as an indispensable auxiliary in this good work. Heracles was its favourite hero; Heracleitus, perhaps, the first source of its philosophic inspiration. The great Ephesian thinker asserted of his theories that they are 'in accordance with nature' (κατὰ φύσιν, *Fragm.* 1); of all human laws that they are nourished by the one divine law (19); of the sun that if he transgresses his measures the Erinyes who succour justice will find him out (34). But such an absolute harmony between natural and civil law as Heracleitus dreamt of does not exist; and the idea of nature as a moral standard could not be framed until the variability and viciousness of human conventions had been denounced. To have perceived this was the immortal merit of Hippias, a merit that historians are now only beginning to acknowledge. He rather than Socrates indicates the direct line of development on which the Cynic and the Stoic schools were built up. How then are we to explain the sneering, slighting tone in which he is invariably mentioned by Plato? I think it is due to the circumstances of that great writer's early education. Under the influence of Socrates he had learned to look on all physical science as an impious delusion. Under the influence of his aristocratic environment he had learned to look on an intimate knowledge of public affairs and an easy mastery of language as the most appropriate characteristics of an Athenian gentleman (καλοκάγαθός). Now these were accomplishments more readily acquired in the schools of

Protagoras and Gorgias than in the schools of Hippias and Prodicus ; and accordingly we always find that Plato treats the two first-named Sophists with a respect that he never extends to their rivals. It was probably the fashion in humanist circles to treat the two naturalists as a pair of pretentious pedants. Moreover, the sybaritism of Prodicus and the showy exterior of Hippias might seem to accord but ill with the asceticism and the return to nature that they taught ; more especially to one who had ever before his eyes in the person of Socrates the great type of a martyr philosopher, in life and death the complete realisation of his own ideal. And this, let me observe, is the reason why Antisthenes, to the great confusion of history, has always been treated as a disciple and continuator of Socrates rather than of his real masters, the naturalists. It was because he learned from Socrates to live out his naturalism just as Aristippus learned to live out his hedonistic humanism ; whereas Hippias and Prodicus fell into the category of artists who earn a good income by producing beautiful things without necessarily being beautiful themselves or leading beautiful lives.

Plato may have felt his early dislike for naturalism rather heightened than appeased by the very unconciliatory attitude of Antisthenes towards himself personally ; but other influences, more abstract and intellectual, operated in its favour. His mathematical studies convinced him that a real knowledge of nature was after all not unattainable. In later life, according to the now accepted arrangement of his dialogues, he became for the first time well acquainted with the works of the Ionian physiologists and of the Eleatic school. From these he acquired a greater interest in nature as visibly manifested under the limits of time and space, in the heavenly bodies, and in the forms of animal life. As a moralist and politician he sought everywhere for practical lessons. An examination of his latest work has abundantly shown us that he found such lessons in nature, or rather that he rediscovered what the older naturalists had taught in respect to chastity, justice, and truth.

CHAPTER VIII

CHARACTERISTICS OF ARISTOTLE

I

PERSONALLY, we know more about Aristotle than about any other Greek philosopher of the classic period; but what we know does not amount to much. It is little more than the skeleton of a life, a bald enumeration of names and dates and places, with a few more or less doubtful anecdotes interspersed. These I will now relate, together with whatever inferences the facts seem to warrant. Aristotle was born 384 B.C., at Stageira, a Greek colony in Thrace. It is remarkable that every single Greek thinker of note, Socrates and Plato alone excepted, came from the confines of Hellenedom and barbarism. It has been conjectured by Auguste Comte, I know not with how much reason, that religious traditions were weaker in the colonies than in the parent states, and thus allowed freer play to independent speculation. Perhaps, also, the accumulation of wealth was more rapid, thus affording greater leisure for thought; while the pettiness of political life liberated a fund of intellectual energy, which in more powerful communities might have been devoted to the service of the State. Left an orphan in early youth, Aristotle was brought up by one Proxenus, to whose son, Nicanor, he afterwards repaid the debt of gratitude. In his eighteenth year he settled at Athens, and attended the school of Plato until the death of that philosopher twenty years afterwards. It is not clear whether the younger thinker was quite conscious of his vast intellectual debt to the elder, and he continually emphasises the points on which they differ; but personally his feeling towards the master was one of deep reverence and affection. In some beautiful lines, still extant, he speaks of 'an altar of solemn friendship dedicated to one of whom the bad should not speak even in praise; who alone, or who first among mortals, proved by his own life and by his system, that goodness and happiness go hand in hand;' ¹ and it is generally agreed that the reference can only be to Plato.

¹ Gomperz throws doubt on this identification (*Griechische Denker*, ii., p. 57); but it is upheld by a more recent historian, Paul Deussen (*Ph. d. Griech.*, p. 322).

Again, in his *Ethics*, Aristotle expresses reluctance to criticise the ideal theory, because it was held by dear friends of his own; adding the memorable declaration, that to a philosopher truth should be dearer still. What opinion Plato formed of his most illustrious pupil is less certain. According to one tradition, he surnamed Aristotle the *Nous* of his school. It could, indeed, hardly escape so penetrating an observer that the omnivorous appetite for knowledge, which he regarded as most especially characteristic of the philosophic temperament, possessed this young learner to a degree never before paralleled among the sons of men. He may, however, have considered that the Stagirite's method of acquiring knowledge was unfavourable to its fresh and vivid apprehension. An expression has been preserved which can hardly be other than genuine, so distinguished is it by that delicate mixture of compliment and satire in which Plato particularly excelled. He is said to have called Aristotle's house the 'house of the reader.' The author of the *Phaedrus*, himself a tolerably voluminous writer, was, like Carlyle, not an admirer of literature. Probably it occurred to him that a philosophical student, who had the privilege of listening to his own lectures, might do better than shut himself up with a heap of manuscripts, away from the human inspiration of social intercourse, and the divine inspiration of solitary thought. We moderns have no reason to regret a habit which has made Aristotle's writings a storehouse of ancient speculations; but from a scientific, no less than from an artistic point of view, those works are overloaded with criticisms of earlier opinions, some of them quite undeserving of serious discussion.

Philosophy was no sooner domiciled at Athens than its professors came in for their full share of the scurrilous personalities which seem to have formed the staple of conversation in that enlightened capital. Aristotle, himself a trenchant and sometimes a bitterly scornful controversialist, did not escape; and some of the censures passed on him were, rightly or wrongly, attributed to Plato. The Stagirite, who had been brought up at or near the Macedonian Court, and had inherited considerable means, was, if report speaks truly, somewhat foppish in his dress, and luxurious, if not dissipated in his habits. It would not be surprising if one who was left his own master at so early an age had at first exceeded the limits of that moderation which he afterwards inculcated as the golden rule of morals; but the charge of extravagance was such a stock accusation at Athens, where the continued influence of country life seems to have bred a prejudice in favour of parsimony, that it may be taken almost as an exoneration from graver imputations; and, perhaps, an admonition from Plato, if any was needed, sufficed to check his disciple's ambition for figuring as a man of fashion.

We cannot tell to what extent the divergences which afterwards made Plato and Aristotle pass for types of the most extreme intellectual opposition were already manifested during their personal intercourse. The tradition is that the teacher compared his pupil to a foal that kicks his mother after draining her dry. There is a certain rough truth as well as rough wit about the remark; but the author of the *Parmenides* could hardly have been much affected by criticisms on the ideal theory which he had himself reasoned out with equal candour and acuteness; and if, as some feel tempted to conjecture, those criticisms were first suggested to him by Aristotle in conversation, it will be still more evident that they were received without offence.¹

In some respects, Aristotle began not only as a disciple but as a champion of Platonism. On the popular side, that doctrine was distinguished by its essentially religious character, and by its opposition to the rhetorical training then in vogue. Now, Aristotle's dialogues, of which only a few fragments have been preserved, contained elegant arguments in favour of a creative First Cause, and of human immortality; although in the writings which embody his maturer views, the first of these theories is considerably modified, and the second is absolutely rejected. Further, we are informed that Aristotle expressed himself in terms of rather violent contempt for Isocrates, the greatest living professor of declamation; and opened an opposition school of his own. This step has, curiously enough, been adduced as a further proof of disagreement with Plato, who, it is said, objected to all rhetorical teaching whatever. But what he condemned was rather the method and aim of the then fashionable rhetoric; and a considerable portion of his *Phaedrus* is devoted to proving how much more effectually persuasion might be produced by the combined application of dialectics and psychology to oratory. Now, this is precisely what Aristotle afterwards attempted to work out in the treatise on Rhetoric still preserved among his writings; and we may safely assume that his earlier lectures at Athens were composed on the same principle.

In 347 Plato died, leaving his nephew Speusippus to succeed him in the headship of the Academy. Aristotle then left Athens, accompanied by another Platonist, Xenocrates, a circumstance tending to prove that his relations with the school continued to be of a cordial character. The two settled in

¹ Such a view of the *Parmenides* has been maintained by Tocco (*Ricerche Platoniche*, p. 105); and afterwards, but independently, by Teichmüller (*Neue Studien*, iii., p. 363). See Chiappelli, *Della Interpretazione panteistica di Platone*, p. 152, and, for a more advanced view of the whole subject, J. A. Stewart, *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas*, pp. 69 sqq.

Atarneus, at the invitation of its tyrant Hermeias, an old fellow-student from the Academy. Hermeias was a eunuch who had risen from the position of a slave to that of vizier, and then, after his master's death, to the possession of supreme power. Three years subsequently a still more abrupt turn of fortune brought his adventurous career to a close. Like Polycrates, he was treacherously seized and crucified by order of the Persian Government. Aristotle, who had married Pythias, his deceased patron's niece, fled with her to Mitylênê. Always grateful, and singularly enthusiastic in his attachments, he celebrated the memory of Hermeias in a manner which gave great offence to the religious sentiment of Hellas, by dedicating a statue to him at Delphi, and composing an elegy, still extant, in which he compares the eunuch-despot to Heracles, the Dioscuri, Achilles, and Ajax ; and promises him immortality from the Muses in honour of Xenian Zeus.

When we next hear of Aristotle he is at the Macedonian Court,¹ acting as tutor to Alexander, the future conqueror of Asia, who remained under his charge between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years. The philosopher is more likely to have obtained this appointment by Court interest—his father was Court-physician to Alexander's grandfather, Amyntas—than by his reputation, which could hardly have been made until several years afterwards. Much has been made of a connexion which, although it did not last very long, appeals strongly to the imagination, and opens a large field for surmise. The greatest speculative and the greatest practical genius of that age—some might say of all ages—could not, one would think, come into such close contact without leaving a deep impression on each other. Accordingly, the philosopher is supposed to have prepared the hero for his future destinies. Milton has told us how Aristotle 'bred great Alexander to subdue the world.' Hegel tells us that this was done by giving him the consciousness of himself, the full assurance of his own powers ; for which purpose, it seems, the infinite daring of thought was required ; and he observes that the result is a refutation of the silly talk about the practical inutility of philosophy.² The utility of philosophy as a training for character has more than once been illustrated by the lives of great conquerors and statesmen ; but Alexander was not one of these. Neither for good nor for evil does his career seem to have been affected by Aristotle's principles. No Greek ever displayed less of the characteristic Greek Sôphrosynê which is the master-thought of

¹ Teichmüller infers, from certain expressions in the *Panathenæicus* of Isocrates, that Aristotle had returned from Mitylênê to Athens and resumed his former position as a teacher of rhetoric when the summons to Pella reached him. (*Lit. Fehden*, 261.)

² *Gesch. d. Phil.*, vol. ii., p. 302.

his tutor's whole system. His curiosity, his passion for empire, his passion for the diffusion of culture, his affectionateness, and unhappily also his vainglory and resentfulness were without limit or discrimination or self-control. The time came when Aristotle himself would have run the most imminent personal risk had he been within the despot's immediate grasp. His nephew, Callisthenes, had incurred deep displeasure by protesting against the servile adulation, or rather idolatry, which Alexander exacted from his attendants. A charge of conspiracy was trumped up against him, and even the exculpatory evidence, taken under torture, of his alleged accomplices did not save him. 'I will punish the sophist,' wrote Alexander, 'and those who sent him out.' It was understood that his old tutor was included in the threat. Fortunately, as Grote observes, Aristotle was not at Ecbatana but at Athens; he therefore escaped the fate of Callisthenes, who suffered death in circumstances, according to some accounts, of great atrocity.

The profit reaped by Aristotle from the connexion seems equally doubtful. Tradition tells us that enormous sums of money were spent in aid of his scientific researches, and a whole army of crown servants deputed to collect information bearing on his zoological studies. Modern explorations, however, have proved that the conquests of Alexander, at least, did not, as has been pretended, supply Aristotle with any new specimens; nor does the knowledge contained in his extant treatises exceed what could be obtained either by his own observations or by private enquiries. At the same time we may suppose that his services were handsomely rewarded, and that his official position at the Macedonian Court gave him numerous opportunities for conversing with the grooms, huntsmen, shepherds, fishermen, and others, from whom most of what he tells us about the habits of animals was learned. In connexion with the favour enjoyed by Aristotle, it must be mentioned as a proof of his amiable character, that he obtained the restoration of Stageira, which had been ruthlessly destroyed by Philip together with the other Greek cities of the Chalcidic peninsula.

Two passages in Aristotle's writings have been supposed to give evidence of his admiration for Alexander. One is the description of the magnanimous man in the *Ethics*. The other is a reference in the *Politics* to an ideal hero, whose virtue raises him so high above the common run of mortals that their duty is to obey him as if he were a god. But the magnanimous man embodies a grave and stately type of character quite unlike the chivalrous, impulsive theatrical nature of Alexander,¹ though probably not unfrequent among real Hellenes; and the

¹ Cp. Teichmüller, *Lit. Fehden*, 192.

god-like statesman of the *Politics* is spoken of rather as an unattainable ideal than as a contemporary fact. On the whole, then, we must conclude that the intercourse between these two extraordinary spirits has left no distinct trace on the actions of the one or on the thoughts of the other.

On Alexander's departure for the East, Aristotle returned to Athens, where he now placed himself at the head of a new philosophical school. The ensuing period of thirteen years was fully occupied by the delivery of public lectures, and by the composition of those encyclopaedic writings which will preserve his memory for ever, along, perhaps, with many others which have not survived. Like Anaxagoras, he was not allowed to end his days in the city of his adoption. His youthful attacks on Isocrates had probably made him many enemies among that rhetor's pupils. It is supposed by Grote, but warmly disputed by Zeller, that his trenchant criticisms on Plato had excited a similar animosity among the sectaries of the Academy.¹ Anyhow, circumstances had unavoidably associated him with the detested Macedonian party, although his position, as a metic, or resident alien, debarred him from taking any active part in politics. With Alexander's death the storm broke loose. A charge was trumped up against Aristotle, on the strength of his unlucky poem in honour of Hermeias, which was described as an insult to religion. That such an accusation should be chosen is characteristic of Athenian bigotry, even should there be no truth in the story that certain philosophical opinions of his were likewise singled out for prosecution. Before the case came on for trial, Aristotle availed himself of the usual privilege allowed on such occasions, and withdrew to Chalcis, in order, as he said, that the Athenians need not sin a second time against philosophy. But his constitution, naturally a feeble one, was nearly worn out. A year afterwards he succumbed to a stomach complaint, aggravated, if not produced, by incessant mental application. His contemporary, Demosthenes, perished about the same time, and at the same age, sixty-two. Within little more than a twelvemonth the world had lost its three greatest men; and after three centuries of uninterrupted glory, Hellas was left unrepresented by a single individual of commanding genius.

We are told that when his end came within sight, the dying philosopher was pressed to choose a successor in the headship of the School. The manner in which he did this is characteristic of his singular gentleness and unwillingness to give offence. It was understood that the choice must lie between his two most distinguished pupils, Theophrastus of Lesbos, and Eudæmus of Rhodes. Aristotle asked for specimens of the

¹ Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, vol. ii. 2, p. 38 (3rd ed.).

wine grown in those islands. He first essayed the Rhodian vintage, and praised it highly, but remarked after tasting the other, 'The Lesbian is sweeter,' thus revealing his preference for Theophrastus, who accordingly reigned over the Lyceum in his stead.¹

A document purporting to be Aristotle's will has been preserved by Diogenes, and although some objections to its authenticity have been raised by Sir A. Grant, they seem to have been successfully rebutted by Zeller.² The philosopher's testamentary dispositions give one more proof of his thoughtful consideration for the welfare of those about him, and his devotion to the memory of departed friends. Careful provision is made for the guardianship of his youthful children, and for the comfort of his second wife, Herpyllis, who, he says, had 'been good to' him. Certain slaves, specified by name, are to be emancipated, and to receive legacies. None of the young slaves who waited on him are to be sold, and on growing up they are to be set free 'if they deserve it.' The bones of his first wife, Pythias, are, as she herself desired, to be laid by his. Monuments are to be erected in memory of his mother, and of certain friends, particularly Proxenus, who had been Aristotle's guardian, and his family.

In person Aristotle resembled the delicate student of modern times rather than the athletic figures of his predecessors. He was not a soldier like Socrates, nor a gymnast like Plato. To judge from several allusions in his works, he put great faith in walking as a preservative of health—even when lecturing he liked to pace up and down a shady avenue. And, probably, a constitutional was the severest exercise that he ever took. He spoke with a sort of lisp, and his mouth is said to have had a sarcastic expression; a statement confirmed by some of the extant portrait-busts. A free-spoken and fearless critic, he was not over-sensitive on his own account. When told that somebody had been abusing him in his absence, the philosopher replied, 'He may beat me, too, if he likes—in my absence.' He might be abused, even in his own presence, without departing from the same attitude of calm disdain, much to the disappointment of his petulant assailants. His equanimity was but slightly disturbed by more public and substantial affronts. When certain honorary distinctions, conferred on him by a popular vote at Delphi, were withdrawn, probably on the occasion of his flight from Athens, he remarked with his usual studied moderation, that, while not entirely indifferent, he did not feel very deeply concerned; a trait which illustrates the

¹ Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.*, xiii., 5. Ritter and Preller reject the story; Zeller thinks it entirely credible and characteristic (*Ph. d. Gr.*, ii. 2, p. 42, note (3rd ed.)).

² *Op. cit.*, p. 41, note 2.

character of the 'magnanimous man' far better than anything related of Alexander. Two other sayings have an almost Christian tone; when asked how we should treat our friends, he replied, 'As we should wish them to treat us;' and on being reproached with wasting his bounty on an unworthy object, he observed, 'it was not the person, but the human being that I pitied.'¹

Still, taking it altogether, the life of Aristotle gives one the impression of something rather desultory and dependent, not proudly self-determined, like the lives of the thinkers who went before him. We are reminded of the fresh starts and the appeals to authority so frequent in his writings. He is first detained at Athens twenty years by the attraction of Plato; and no sooner is Plato gone, than he falls under the influence of an entirely different character—Hermeias. Even when his services are no longer needed he lingers near the Macedonian Court, until Alexander's departure leaves him once more without a patron. The most dignified period of his whole career is that during which he presided over the Peripatetic School; but he owes this position to foreign influence, and loses it with the temporary revival of Greek liberty. A longer life would probably have seen him return to Athens in the train of his last patron Antipater, whom, as it was, he appointed executor to his will. This was just the sort of character to lay great stress on the evidentiary value of sensation and popular opinion. It was also the character of a conservative who was likely to believe that things had always been very much what they were in his time, and would continue to remain so ever afterwards. Aristotle was not the man to imagine that the present order of nature had sprung out of a widely different order in the remote past, nor to encourage such speculations when they were offered to him by others. He would not readily believe that phenomena, as he knew them, rested on a reality which could neither be seen nor felt. Nor, finally, could he divine the movements which were slowly undermining the society in which he lived, still less construct an ideal polity for its reorganisation on a higher and broader basis. And here we at once become conscious of the chief difference separating him from his master, Plato.

II

It is an often-quoted observation of Friedrich Schlegel's that every man is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. If we narrow the remark to the only class which, perhaps, its author recognised as human beings, namely, all thinking men,

¹ Laert. D., v., 17-21.

it will be found to contain a certain amount of truth, though probably not what Schlegel intended; at any rate something requiring to be supplemented by other truths before its full meaning can be understood. The common opinion seems to be that Plato was a transcendentalist, while Aristotle was an experientialist; and that this constitutes the most typical distinction between them. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that the *a priori* and *a posteriori* methods were marked off with such definiteness in Plato's time as to render possible a choice between them. The opposition was not between general propositions and particular facts, but between the most comprehensive and the most limited notions. It was as if the question were now to be raised whether we should begin to teach physiology by at once dividing the organic from the inorganic world, or by directing the learner's attention to some one vital act. Now, we are expressly told that Plato hesitated between these two methods; and in his dialogues, at least, we find the easier and more popular one employed by preference. It is true that he often appeals to wide principles which do not rest on an adequate basis of experimental evidence; but Aristotle does so also, more frequently even, and, as the event proved, with more fatal injury to the advance of knowledge. In his *Rhetoric* he even goes beyond Plato, constructing the entire art from the general principles of dialectics, psychology, and ethics, without any reference, except for the sake of illustration, to existing models of eloquence.

According to Sir A. Grant, it is by the mystical and poetical side of his nature that Plato differs from Aristotle. The one 'aspired to a truth above the truth of scientific knowledge'; the other to 'methodised experience and the definite.'¹ Now, setting aside the question whether there is any truth above the truth of scientific knowledge, whether Plato believed in its existence is very doubtful. He held that the most valuable truth was that which could be imparted to others by a process even more rigorous than mathematical reasoning; and there was no reality, however transcendent, that he did not hope to bring within the grasp of a dialectic without which even the meanest could not be understood. He did, indeed, believe that, so far, the best and wisest of mankind had owed much more to a divinely implanted instinct than to any conscious chain of reflection; but he distinctly asserted the inferiority of such guidance to the light of scientific knowledge, if this could be obtained, as he hoped that it could. On the other hand, Aristotle was probably superior to Plato as a poet;² and in speaking about

¹ Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 7.

² See the passage on Aristotle's *Hymn to Virtue* quoted from Mahaffy in a note on chap. v., p. 154.

the highest realities he uses language which, though less rich and ornate than his master's, is not inferior to it in force and fervour ; while his metaphysical theories contain a large element of what would now be considered mysticism, that is, he often sees evidence of purpose and animation where they do not really exist. His advantage in definiteness is, of course, indisputable, but this was, perhaps, because he came after Plato and profited by his lessons.

Yet there *was* a difference between them, marking off each as the head of a whole School much wider than the Academy or the Lyceum ; a difference which can best be expressed by saying that Plato was pre-eminently a practical, Aristotle pre-eminently a speculative genius. The object of the one was to reorganise all human life, that of the other to reorganise all human knowledge. Had the one lived earlier, he would more probably have been a great statesman or a great general than a great writer ; the other would at no time have been anything but a philosopher, a mathematician, or a historian. Even from birth they seemed to be respectively marked out for an active and for a contemplative life : the one, a citizen of the foremost State in Hellas, sprung from a family in which political ambition was hereditary, himself strong, beautiful, fascinating, eloquent, and gifted with the keenest insight into men's capacities and motives ; the other a Stagirite and an Asclepiad, that is to say, without opportunities for a public career, and possessing a hereditary aptitude for anatomy and natural history, fitted by his insignificant person and delicate constitution for sedentary pursuits, and better able to acquire a knowledge even of human nature from books than from a living converse with men and affairs. Of course, I am not for a moment denying to Plato a foremost place among the masters of those who know ; he embraced all the science of his age, and to a great extent marked out the course which the science of future ages was to pursue ; nevertheless, for him, knowledge was not so much an end in itself as a means for the attainment of other ends, among which the preservation of the State seems to have been, in his eyes, the most important. Aristotle, on the other hand, after declaring happiness to be the supreme end, defines it as an energising of man's highest nature, which again he identifies with the reasoning process or cognition in its purest form.

The same fundamental difference comes out strongly in their respective theologies. Plato starts with the conception that God is good, and being good wishes everything to resemble himself ; an assumption from which the divine origin and providential government of the world are deduced.¹ Aristotle

¹ That is as articles of a State-religion. Personally Plato seems to have been what may be called a Cosmotheist.

thinks of God as exclusively occupied in self-contemplation, and only acting on nature through the love which his perfection inspires. If, further, we consider in what relation the two philosophies stand to ethics, we shall find that, to Plato, its problems were the most pressing of all, that they haunted him through his whole life, and that he made contributions of extraordinary value towards their solution; while to Aristotle it was merely a branch of natural history, a study of the different types of character to be met with in Greek society, without the faintest perception that conduct required to be set on a wider and firmer basis than the conventional standards of his age. Hence it is that, in reading Plato, we are perpetually reminded of the controversies still raging among ourselves. He gives us an exposition, to which nothing has ever been added, of the theory now known as Egoistic Hedonism; he afterwards abandons that theory, and passes on to the social side of conduct, the necessity of justice, the relation of private to public interest, the bearing of religion, education, and social institutions on morality, along with other kindred topics, which need not be further specified, as they have been discussed with sufficient fulness in the preceding chapters. Aristotle, on the contrary, takes us back into old Greek life as it was before the days of Socrates, noticing the theories of that great reformer only that he may reject them in favour of a narrow, common-sense standard. Virtuous conduct, he tells us, consists in choosing a mean between two extremes. If we ask how the proper mean is to be discovered, he refers us to a faculty called *φρόνησις*, or practical reason; but on further enquiry it turns out that this faculty is possessed by none who are not already virtuous. To the question, How are men made moral? he answers, By acquiring moral habits; which amounts to little more than a restatement of the problem, or, at any rate, suggests another more difficult question—How are good habits acquired?

An answer might conceivably have been supplied, had Aristotle been enabled to complete that sketch of an ideal State which was originally intended to form part of his *Politics*. But the philosopher evidently found that to do so was beyond his powers. If the seventh and eighth books of that treatise, which contain the fragmentary attempt in question, had originally occupied the place where they now stand in our manuscripts, it might have been supposed that Aristotle's labours were interrupted by death. Modern criticism has shown, however, that they should follow immediately after the first three books, and that the author broke off, almost at the beginning of his ideal polity, to take up the much more congenial task of analysing and criticising the actually existing Hellenic constitutions.

But the little that he has done proves him to have been profoundly unfitted for the task of a practical reformer. What few actual recommendations it contains are a compromise—somewhat in the spirit of Plato's *Laws*—between the *Republic* and real life. The rest is what he never fails to give us—a mass of details about matters of fact, and a summary of his speculative ethics, along with counsels of moderation in the spirit of his practical ethics; but not one practical principle of any value, not one remark to show that he understood what direction history was taking, or that he had mastered the elements of social reform as set forth in Plato's works. The progressive specialisation of political functions; the necessity of a spiritual power; the formation of a trained standing army; the admission of women to public employments; the elevation of the whole race by artificial selection; the radical reform of religion; the reconstitution of education, both literary and scientific, the redistribution of property; the enactment of a new code; the use of public opinion as an instrument of moralisation;—these are the ideas which still agitate the minds of men, and they are also the ideas of the *Republic*, the *Statesman*, and the *Laws*. Aristotle, on the other hand, occupies himself chiefly with discussing how far a city should be built from the sea, whether it should be fortified; how its citizens should *not* be employed; when people should *not* marry; what children should *not* be permitted to see; and what music they should *not* be taught. Apart from his enthusiasm for philosophy, there is nothing generous, nothing large-minded, nothing inspiring. The territory of the city is to be self-sufficing, that it may be isolated from other States; the citizens are to keep aloof from all industrial occupations; science is put out of relation to the material well-being of mankind. It was, in short, to be a University town under Macedonian supremacy, a city where every gentleman should hold an idle fellowship; a city where Aristotle could live without molestation, and in the enjoyment of congenial friendships; just as the God of his system was a still higher Aristotle, perpetually engaged in the study of formal logic.

Even in his much-admired criticisms on the actually existing types of government our philosopher shows practical weakness and vacillation of character. There is a good word for them all—for monarchy, for aristocracy, for middle-class rule, and even for pure democracy.¹ The fifth book, treating of

¹ Edwin Wallace has, however, overstated the case, when he makes Aristotle say that 'democracy is not unlikely with the spread of population to become the ultimate form of government; and may be anticipated without dread by considering that the collective voice of a people is as likely to be sound in state administration as in criticisms on art' (*Outlines of the Philosophy of Aristotle*, pp. 57-8). In the first place, the expressions of opinion which are brought together in Wallace's summary

political revolutions, is unquestionably the ablest and most interesting in the whole work; but when Aristotle quits the domain of natural history for that of practical suggestions, with a view to obviate the dangers pointed out, he can think of nothing better than the old advice—to be moderate, even where the constitutions which moderation is to preserve are by their very nature so excessive that their readjustment and equilibration would be equivalent to their destruction. And in fact, Aristotle's proposals amount to this—that government by the middle class should be established wherever the ideal aristocracy of education is impracticable; or else a government in which the class interests of rich and poor should be so nicely balanced as to obviate the danger of oligarchic or democratic injustice. His error lay in not perceiving that the only possible means of securing such a happy mean was to break through the narrow circle of Greek city life; to continue the process which had united families into villages, and villages into towns; to confederate groups of cities into larger states; and so, by striking an average of different inequalities, to minimise the risk of those incessant revolutions which had hitherto secured the temporary triumph of alternate factions at the expense of their common interest. And, in fact, the spontaneous process of aggregation, which Aristotle did not foresee, has alone sufficed to remedy the evils which he saw, but could not devise any effectual means of curing, and at the same time has bred new evils of which his diagnosis naturally took no account.

But, if this be so, it follows that Edwin Wallace's appeal to Aristotle as an authority worth consulting on our present social difficulties cannot be upheld. Take the question quoted by Wallace himself: 'Whether the State is a mere combination for the preservation of goods and property, or a moral organism developing the idea of right?' Aristotle certainly held very strong opinions in favour of State interference with education

are separated in the original text by a considerable interval—an important circumstance when we are dealing with so inconsistent a writer; then what Aristotle says about the collective wisdom of the people, besides being advanced with extreme hesitation, is not a reassurance against any danger to be dreaded from their supremacy, but an answer to the argument that the few had a natural right to political power from their greater wealth and better education; the whole question being, in this connexion, one of political justice, not of political expediency; finally, not only is 'ultimate form of government' a very strong rendering of the Greek words, but what Aristotle says on the subject in his third book is virtually retracted in the fifth, where oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny are regarded as succeeding each other in any order indifferently, and Plato (or the Platonic Socrates) is censured for assuming a constant sequence of revolutions. The explanation of this change seems to be that when Aristotle wrote his third book he was only acquainted with the history of Athens and a few other of the greater states, but that subsequently a vast collection of facts bearing on the subject came to his knowledge, showing that each form of government embraced more varieties and admitted of more mutations than he had been originally aware of; and this led to a complete recast of his opinions.

and private morality, if that is what the second alternative implies; but does it follow that he would agree with those who advocate a similar supervision at the present day? By no means; because experience has shown that in enormous industrial societies like ours, protection is attended with difficulties and dangers which he could no more foresee than he could foresee the discoveries on which our physical science is based. Or, returning for a moment to ethics, let us take another of Wallace's problems: 'Whether intellectual also involves moral progress?' What possible light can be thrown on it by Aristotle's exposure of the powerlessness of right knowledge to make an individual virtuous, when writers like Buckle have transferred the whole question from a particular to a general ground; from the conduct of individuals to the conduct of men acting in large masses, and over vast periods of time? Or, finally, take the question which forms a point of junction between Aristotle's ethics and his politics: 'Whether the highest life is a life of thought or a life of action?' Of what importance is his decision to us, who attend far more to the social than to the individual consequences of actions; who have learned to take into account the emotional element of happiness, which Aristotle neglected; who are uninfluenced by his appeal to the blissful theorising of gods in whom we do not believe; for whom, finally, experience has altogether broken down the antithesis between knowledge and practice, by showing that speculative ideas may revolutionise the whole of life? Aristotle is an interesting historical study; but we are as far beyond him in social as in physical science.

III

On turning to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* we find that, from a practical point of view, his failure here is, if possible, still more complete. This treatise contains an immense mass of more or less valuable information on the subject of psychology, ethics, and dialectic, but gives exceedingly little advice about the very essence of rhetoric as an art, which is to say whatever you have to say in the most telling manner, by the arrangement of topics and arguments, by the use of illustrations, and by the choice of language; and that little is to be found in the third book, the genuineness of which is open to very grave suspicion. It may be doubted whether any orator or critic of oratory was ever benefited in the slightest degree by the study of Aristotle's rules. His collections of scientific data add nothing to our knowledge, but only throw common experience into abstract formulas; and even as a body of memoranda they would be useless, for no memory could contain them, or if any man could

remember them he would have intellect enough not to require them.¹ The professional teachers whom Aristotle so heartily despised seem to have followed a much more effectual method than his; they gave their pupils ready-made speeches to analyse and learn by heart, rightly trusting to the imitative instinct to do the rest. He compares them to a master who should teach his apprentices how to make shoes by supplying them with a great variety of ready-made pairs. But this would be a much better plan than to give them an elaborate lecture on the anatomy of the foot, with a full enumeration of its bones, muscles, tendons, nerves, and blood-vessels, which is the most appropriate parallel to *his* system of instruction.

The *Poetics* of Aristotle contains some hints on the subject of composition which entitle it to be mentioned in the present connexion. The deficiencies, even from a purely theoretical point of view, of this work, once pronounced infallible, have at last become so obvious that elaborate hypotheses have been constructed, according to which the recension handed down to us is a mere mutilated extract from the original treatise. Enough, however, remains to convince us that poetry was not, any more than eloquence, a subject with which Aristotle was fitted to cope. He begins by defining it, in common with all other art, as an imitation. Here, we at once recognise the spirit of a philosophy, the whole power and interest of which lay in knowledge; and, in fact, he tells us that the love of art is derived from the love of knowledge. But the truth seems to be that aesthetic enjoyment is due to an ideal exercise of our faculties, among which the power of perceiving identities is sometimes, though not always, included. That the materials of which every artistic creation is composed are taken from the world of our experience makes no difference; for it is by the new forms in which they are arranged that we are interested, not because we remember having met them in some natural combination already. Aristotle could not help seeing that this was true in the case of music at least; and he can only save his principle by treating musical effects as representations of passions in the soul. To say, however, that musical pleasure arises from a perception of resemblance between certain sounds and the emotions with which they are associated, would be an extremely forced interpretation; the pleasure is due rather to a sympathetic participation in the emotion itself. And when Aristotle goes on to tell us that the characters

¹ Many of the topics noted are not only trite enough, but have no possible bearing on the subject under which they stand. For instance, in discussing judicial eloquence Aristotle goes into the motives for committing crimes; among these are pleasurable feelings of every kind, including the remembrance of past trouble. Even the hero of a spasmodic tragedy would hardly have committed an offence for the purpose of procuring himself this form of experience.

imitated in epic and dramatic poetry may be either better or worse than in ordinary life, he is obviously admitting other aesthetic motives not accounted for by his general theory. If, on the other hand, we start with ideal energising as the secret of aesthetic emotion, we can easily understand how an imaginary exaltation of our faculties is yielded by the spectacle of something either rising above, or falling below, the level on which we stand. In the one case we become momentarily invested with the strength put into action before our eyes; in the other, the consciousness of our own superiority amounts to a fund of reserve power, which *not* being put into action, is entirely available for ideal enjoyment. And, if this be the correct view, it will follow that Aristotle was quite wrong when he declared the plot to be more important than the characters of a drama. The reason given for his preference is, even on the principles of his own philosophy, a bad one. He says that there can be plot without character-drawing, but never character-drawing without plot. Yet he has taught us elsewhere that the human soul is of more value than the physical organism on which its existence depends. This very parallel suggests itself to him in his *Poetics*; but, by an almost inconceivable misjudgment, it is the plot which he likens to the soul of the piece, whereas in truth it should be compared to the body. The practice and preference of his own time may have helped to mislead him, for he argues (rather inconsistently, by the way) that plot must be more indispensable, as young writers are able to construct good stories before they are able to portray character; and more artistic, as it was developed much later in the historical evolution of tragedy. Fortunately for us, the Alexandrian critics were guided by other canons of taste, or the tragedies of his almost impeccable favourite Agathon might have been preserved instead of the ill-constructed tragedies of Aeschylus.

It is probable, however, that Aristotle's partiality was determined more by the systematising and analytical character of his own genius than by the public opinion of his age; or rather, the same tendency was at work in philosophy and in art at the same time, the theories of the one being unconsciously pre-adapted to the productions of the other. In both there was a decay of penetration and of originality, of life and of inspiration; in both a great development of whatever could be obtained by technical proficiency; in both an extension of surface at the expense of depth, a gain of fluency, and a loss of force. But poetry lost far more than philosophy by the change; and so the works of the one have perished while the works of the other have survived.

Modern literature offers abundant materials for testing Aristotle's theory, and the immense majority of critics have

decided against it. Even among less educated readers few would prefer Molière's *L'Étourdi* to his *Misanthrope*, or Schiller's *Maria Stuart* to Goethe's *Faust*, or Lord Lytton's *Lucretia* to George Eliot's *Romola*, or Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities* to the same writer's *Nicholas Nickleby*, or his *Great Expectations* to his *David Copperfield*, although in each instance the work named first has the better plot of the two.

Characters, then, are not introduced that they may perform actions ; but actions are represented for the sake of the characters who do them, or who suffer by them. It is not so much a ghostly apparition or a murder which interests us as the fact that the ghost appears to Hamlet, and that the murder is committed by Macbeth. And the same is true of the Greek drama, though not perhaps to the same extent. We may care for Oedipus chiefly on account of his adventures ; but we care far more for what Prometheus or Clytemnestra, Antigone or Ajax, say about themselves than for what they suffer or what they do. Thus, and thus only, are we enabled to understand the tragic element in poetry, the production of pleasure by the spectacle of pain. It is not the satisfaction caused by seeing a skilful imitation of reality, for few have witnessed such awful events in real life as on the stage ; nor is it pain, as such, which interests us, for the scenes of torture exhibited in some Spanish and Bolognese paintings do not gratify, they revolt and disgust an educated taste. The true tragic emotion is produced, not by the suffering itself, but by the reaction of the characters against it ; for this gives, more than anything else, the idea of a force with which we can synergise, because it is purely mental ; or by the helpless submission of the victims whom we wish to assist because they are lovable, and whom we love still more from our inability to assist them, through the transformation of arrested action into feeling, accompanied by the enjoyment proper to tender emotion. Hence the peculiar importance of the female parts in dramatic poetry. Aristotle tells us that it is bad art to represent women as nobler and braver than men, because they are not so in reality.¹ Nevertheless, he should have noticed that on the tragic stage of Athens women first competed with men, then equalled, and finally far surpassed them in loftiness of character.² But with his philosophy he could not see that, if heroines did not exist, it would be necessary to create them.

¹ *Poet.*, xv., p. 1454, a, 20.

² μάτην ἄρ' εἰς γυναῖκας ἐξ ἀνδρῶν ψόγος
ψάλλει κενὸν τόξευμα καὶ κακῶς λέγει.
αἱ δ' εἴσ' ἀμείνους ἀρσένων, ἐγὼ λέγω.

Euripides, *Frag.* 512. (Didot.)

Vain are the taunts that men at women fling,
The idle twanging of an empty bow ;
I tell you they are better than the males.

For, if women are conceived as reacting against outward circumstances at all, their very helplessness will lead to the storing of a greater mental tension in the shape of excited thought and feeling debarred from any manifestation except in words ; and it is exactly with this mental tension that the spectator can most easily synergise. The wrath of Orestes is not interesting, because it is entirely absorbed into the pre-meditation and execution of his vengeance. The passion of Electra is profoundly interesting, because it has no outlet but impotent denunciations of her oppressors, and abortive schemes for her deliverance from their yoke. Hence, also, Shakespeare produces some of his greatest effects by placing his male characters, to some extent, in the position of women, either through their natural weakness and indecision, as with Hamlet, and Brutus, and Macbeth, or through the paralysis of unproved suspicion, as with Othello ; while the greatest of all his heroines, Lady Macbeth, is so because she has the intellect and will to frame resolutions of dauntless ambition, and eloquence to force them on her husband, without either the physical or the moral force to execute them herself. In all these cases it is the arrest of an electric current which produces the most intense heat, or the most brilliant illumination. Again, by their extreme sensitiveness, and by the natural desire felt to help them, women excite more pity, which, as I have said, means more love, than men ; and this in the highest degree when their sufferings are undeserved. We see, then, how wide Aristotle went of the mark when he made it a rule that the sufferings of tragic characters should be partly brought on by their own fault, and that, speaking generally, they should not be distinguished for justice or virtue, nor yet for extreme wickedness.¹ The 'immoderate moderation' of the Stagirite was never more infelicitously exhibited. For, in order to produce truly tragic effects, excess of every kind not only may, but must, be employed. It is by the reaction of heroic fortitude, either against unmerited outrage, or against the whole pressure of social law, that our synergetic interest is wound up to the intensest pitch. It is when we see a beautiful soul requited with evil for good that our eyes are filled with the noblest tears. Yet so absolutely perverted have men's minds been by the Aristotelian dictum that Gervinus, the great Shakespearian critic, actually tries to prove that Duncan, to some extent, deserved his fate by rashly trusting himself to the hospitality of Macbeth ; that Desdemona was very imprudent in interceding for Cassio ; and that it was treasonable for Cordelia to bring a French army into England ! The Greek drama might have supplied Aristotle with several decisive

¹ *Poet.*, xiii., p. 1453, a, 8.

contradictions of his canons. He should have seen that the *Prometheus*, the *Antigone*, and the *Hippolytus* are affecting in proportion to the pre-eminent virtue of their protagonists. The further fallacy of excluding very guilty characters is, of course, most decisively refuted by Shakespeare, whose Richard III., whose Iago, and whose Macbeth excite keen interest by their association of extraordinary villainy with extraordinary intellectual gifts.

So far Aristotle gives us a purely superficial and sensational view of the drama. Yet he could not help seeing that there was a moral element in tragedy, and he was anxious to show, as against Plato, that it exercised an improving effect on the audience. The result is his famous theory of the Catharsis, so long misunderstood, and not certainly understood even now. The object of Tragedy, he tells us, is to purify (or purge away) pity and terror by means of those emotions themselves. The *Poetics* seems originally to have contained an explanation of this mysterious utterance, now lost, and critics have endeavoured to supply the gap by writing more than eighty treatises on the subject. The result has been at least to show what Aristotle did *not* mean. The popular version of his dictum, which is that tragedy purges the passions by pity and terror, is clearly inconsistent with the wording of the original text. Pity and terror are both the object and the instrument of purification. Nor yet does he mean, as was once supposed, that each of these emotions is to counterbalance and moderate the other; for this would imply that they are opposed to one another, whereas in the *Rhetoric* he speaks of them as being akin; while a parallel passage in the *Politics*¹ shows him to have believed that the passions are susceptible of psycho-therapeutic treatment. Violent enthusiasm, he tells us, is to be soothed and carried off by a strain of exciting, impassioned music. But whence come the pity and terror which are to be dealt with by tragic poetry? Not, apparently, from the piece itself, for to inoculate the patient with a new disease, merely for the sake of curing it, could do him no imaginable good. To judge from the passage in the *Politics* already referred to, he believes that pity and terror are always present in the minds of all, to a certain extent; and the theory apparently is, that tragedy brings them to the surface, and enables them to be thrown off with an accompaniment of pleasurable feeling. Now, of course, we have a constant capacity for experiencing every passion to which human nature is liable; but to say that in the absence of its appropriate external stimulus we are ever perceptibly and painfully affected by any passion, is to assert what is not true of any sane mind. And, even were it so, were we constantly haunted by vague presentiments of

¹ *Pol.*, viii., 7, p. 1342, a, 10.

evil to ourselves or others, it is anything but clear that fictitious representations of calamity would be the appropriate means for enabling us to get rid of them. Zeller explains that it is the insight into universal laws controlling our destiny, the association of misfortune with a divine justice, which, according to Aristotle, produces the purifying effect;¹ but this would be the purgation of pity and terror, not by themselves, but by the intellectual framework in which they are set, the concatenation of events, the workings of character, or the reference of everything to an eternal cause. The truth is that Aristotle's explanation of the moral effect produced by tragedy is irrational, because his whole conception of tragedy is mistaken. The emotions excited by its highest forms are not terror and pity, but admiration and love, which, in their ideal exercise, are too holy for purification, too high for restriction, and too delightful for relief.²

Before parting for the present with the *Poetics* I must add that it contains one excellent piece of advice to dramatists, which is, to imagine themselves present at the scenes which they are supposing to happen, and also at the representation of their own play. This, however, is an exception which proves the rule, for Aristotle's exclusively theoretic standpoint here, as will sometimes happen, coincides with the truly practical standpoint.

A somewhat similar observation applies to the art of reasoning, which it would be possible to compile by bringing together all the rules on the subject, scattered through the *Organon*. Aristotle has discovered and formulated every canon of theoretical consistency, and every artifice of dialectical debate, with an industry and acuteness which cannot be too highly extolled; and his labours in this direction have perhaps contributed more than those of any other single writer to the intellectual stimulation of after ages; but the kind of genius requisite for such a task was speculative rather than practical; there was no experience of human nature in its concrete manifestations, no prevision of real consequences involved. Such a code might be, and probably was to a great extent, abstracted from the Platonic dialogues; but to work up the processes of thought into a series of dramatic contests, carried on between living individuals, as Plato has done, required a vivid perception and grasp of realities which, and not any poetical mysticism, is what positively distinguishes a Platonist from an Aristotelian.³

¹ Zeller, p. 780.

² The place of the *Poetics* in Aristotle's systematic philosophy is reserved for special treatment in the following chapter.

³ As an illustration of the stimulating effect produced by the study of Aristotle's logic, the following anecdote from the notes to Whately's edition of Bacon's *Essays* may be quoted:—'The late Sir Alexander Johnstone, when acting as temporary Governor of Ceylon (soon after its cession), sat once as judge in a trial of a prisoner

IV

If Aristotle had not his master's enthusiasm for practical reforms, nor his master's command of all the forces by which humanity is raised to a higher life, he had, more even than his master, the Greek passion for knowledge as such, apart from its utilitarian applications, and embracing in its vast orb the lowliest things with the loftiest, the most fragmentary glimpses and the largest revelations of truth. He demanded nothing but the materials for generalisation, and there was nothing from which he could not generalise. There was a place for everything within the limits of his world-wide system. Never in any human soul did the theorising passion burn with so clear and bright and pure a flame. Under its inspiration his style more than once breaks into a strain of sublime, though simple and rugged eloquence. Speaking of that eternal thought which, according to him, constitutes the divine essence, he exclaims :

On this principle the heavens and nature hang. This is that best life which we possess during a brief period only, for there [in the divine reason] it is so always, which with us is impossible. And its activity is pure pleasure ; wherefore waking, feeling, and thinking, are the most pleasurable states, on account of which hope and memory exist. . . . And of all activities theorising is the most delightful and the best, so

for a robbery and murder ; and the evidence seemed to him so conclusive, that he was about to charge the jury (who were native Cingalese) to find a verdict of guilty. But one of the jurors asked and obtained permission to examine the witnesses himself. He had them brought in one by one, and cross-examined them so ably as to elicit the fact that they were *themselves* the perpetrators of the crime, which they afterwards had conspired to impute to the prisoner. And they were accordingly put on their trial and convicted. Sir Alexander Johnstone was greatly struck by the intelligence displayed by this juror, the more so as he was only a small farmer, who was not known to have had any remarkable advantages of education. He sent for him, and after commending the wonderful sagacity he had shown, inquired eagerly what his studies had been. The man replied that he had never read but one book, the only one he possessed, which had long been in his family, and which he delighted to study in his leisure hours. This book he was prevailed on to show to Sir Alexander Johnstone, who put it into the hands of one who knew the Cingalese language. It turned out to be a translation into that language of a large portion of Aristotle's *Organon*. It appears that the Portuguese, when they first settled in Ceylon and other parts of the East, translated into the native languages several of the works then studied in the European Universities, among which were the Latin versions of Aristotle. The Cingalese in question said that if his understanding had been in any degree cultivated and improved, it was to that book that he owed it. It is likely, however (as was observed to me [Whately] by the late Bishop Copleston), that any other book, containing an equal amount of close reasoning and accurate definition, might have answered the same purpose in sharpening the intellect of the Cingalese. Possibly, but not to the same effect. What the Cingalese got into his hands was a triple-distilled essence of Athenian legal procedure. The cross-examining elenchus was first borrowed by Socrates from the Athenian courts and applied to philosophical purposes ; it was still further elaborated by Plato, and finally reduced to abstract rules by Aristotle ; so that in using it as he did the juror was only restoring it to its original purposes.

that if God always has such happiness as we have in our highest moments, it is wonderful, and still more wonderful if he has more.¹

Again, he tells us that—

If happiness consists in the appropriate exercise of our vital functions, then the highest happiness must result from the highest activity, whether we choose to call that reason or anything else which is the ruling and guiding principle within us, and through which we form our conceptions of what is noble and divine; and whether this be intrinsically divine, or only the divinest thing in us, its appropriate activity must be perfect happiness. Now this, which we call the theoretic activity, must be the mightiest; for reason is supreme in our souls and supreme over the objects which it cognises; and it is also the most continuous, for of all activities theorising is that which can be most uninterruptedly carried on. Again, we think that some pleasure ought to be mingled with happiness; if so, of all our proper activities philosophy is confessedly the most pleasurable, the enjoyments afforded by it being wonderfully pure and steady; for the existence of those who are in possession of knowledge is naturally more delightful than the existence of those who merely seek it. Of all virtues this is the most self-sufficing; for while in common with every other virtue it presupposes the indispensable conditions of life, wisdom does not, like justice and temperance and courage, need human objects for its exercise; theorising may go on in perfect solitude; for the co-operation of other men, though helpful, is not absolutely necessary to its activity. All other pursuits are exercised for some end lying outside themselves; war entirely for the sake of peace, and statesmanship in great part for the sake of honour and power; but theorising yields no extraneous profit great or small, and is loved for itself alone. If, then, the energising of pure reason rises above such noble careers as war and statesmanship by its independence, by its inherent delightfulness, and, so far as human frailty will permit, by its untiring vigour, this must constitute perfect human happiness; or rather such a life is more than human, and man can only partake of it through the divine principle within him; wherefore let us not listen to those who tell us that we should have no interests except what are human and mortal like ourselves; but so far as may be put on immortality, and bend all our efforts towards living up to that element of our nature which, though small in compass, is in power and preciousness supreme.²

Let us now see how he carries this passionate enthusiasm for knowledge into the humblest researches of zoology:—

Among natural objects, some exist unchanged through all eternity, while others are generated and decay. The former are divinely glorious, but being comparatively inaccessible to our means of observation, far less is known of them than we could wish; while perishable plants and animals offer abundant opportunities of study to us who live under the

¹ *Metaph.*, xii., 7, p. 1072, b, 13.

² *Eth. Nic.*, x., 7 (somewhat condensed).

same conditions with them. Each science has a charm of its own. For knowledge of the heavenly bodies is so sublime a thing that even a little of it is more delightful than all earthly science put together; just as the smallest glimpse of a beloved beauty is more delightful than the fullest and nearest revelation of ordinary objects; while, on the other hand, where there are greater facilities for observation, science can be carried much further; and our closer kinship with the creatures of earth is some compensation for the interest felt in that philosophy which deals with the divine. Wherefore, in our discussions on living beings we shall, so far as possible, pass over nothing, whether it rank high or low in the scale of estimation. For even such of them as displease the senses, when viewed with the eye of reason as wonderful works of nature afford an inexpressible pleasure to those who can enter philosophically into the causes of things. For, surely, it would be absurd and irrational to look with delight at the images of such objects on account of our interest in the pictorial or plastic skill which they exhibit, and not to take still greater pleasure in a scientific explanation of the realities themselves. We ought not then to shrink with childish disgust from an examination of the lower animals, for there is something wonderful in all the works of nature; and we may repeat what Heracleitus is reported to have said to certain strangers who had come to visit him, but hung back at the door when they saw him warming himself before a fire, bidding them enter boldly, for that there also there were gods; not allowing ourselves to call any creature common or unclean, because there is a kind of natural beauty about them all. For, if anywhere, there is a pervading purpose in the works of nature, and the realisation of this purpose is the beauty of the thing. But if any one should look with contempt on the scientific examination of the lower animals, he must have the same opinion about himself; for the greatest repugnance is felt in looking at the parts of which the human body is composed, such as blood, muscles, bones, veins, and the like.¹ Similarly, in discussing any part or organ we should consider that it is not for the matter of which it consists that we care, but for the whole form; just as in talking about a house it is not bricks and mortar and wood that we mean; and so the theory of nature deals with the essential structure of objects, not with the elements which, apart from that structure, would have no existence at all.²

It is well for the reputation of Aristotle that he could apply himself with such devotion to the arduous and, in his time, inglorious researches of natural history and comparative anatomy, since it was only in those departments that he made any real contributions to physical science. In the studies which were to

¹ It is perfectly possible that Aristotle was not acquainted at first hand with human anatomy. But Sir A. Grant is hardly justified in observing that the words quoted above 'do not show the hardihood of the practised dissector' (*Aristotle*, p. 3). Aristotle simply takes the popular point of view in order to prove that the internal structure of the lower animals is no more offensive to the eye than that of man. And, as he took so much delight in the former, nothing but want of opportunity is likely to have prevented him from extending his researches to the latter.

² *De Part. An.*, i., 5.

him the noblest and most entrancing of all, his speculations are one long record of wearisome, hopeless, unqualified delusion. If, in the philosophy of practice and the philosophy of art, he afforded no real guidance, in the philosophy of nature his guidance has always led men fatally astray. So far as his means of observation extended, there was nothing that he did not attempt to explain, and in every single instance he was wrong. He has written about the general laws of matter and motion, astronomy, chemistry, meteorology, and physiology, with the result that he has probably made more blunders on those subjects than any human being ever made before or after him. And, if there is one thing more astounding than his unbroken infelicity of speculation, it is the imperturbable self-confidence with which he puts forward his fallacies as demonstrated scientific certainties. Had he been right, it was no 'slight or partial glimpses of the beloved' that would have been vouchsafed him, but the 'fullest and nearest revelation' of her beauties. But the more he looked the less he saw. Instead of drawing aside he only thickened and darkened the veils of sense which obscured her, by mistaking them for the glorious forms that lay concealed beneath.

Modern admirers of Aristotle labour to prove that his errors were inevitable, and belonged more to his age than to himself; that without the mechanical appliances of modern times science could not be cultivated with any hope of success. But what are we to say when we find that on one point after another the true explanation had already been surmised by Aristotle's predecessors or contemporaries, only to be scornfully rejected by Aristotle himself? Their hypotheses may often have been very imperfect, and supported by insufficient evidence; but it must have been something more than chance which always led him wrong when they were so often right. To begin with, the infinity of space is not even now, nor will it ever be, established by improved instruments of observation and measurement; it is deduced by a very simple process of reasoning, of which Democritus and others were capable, while Aristotle apparently was not. He rejects the idea because it is inconsistent with certain very arbitrary assumptions and definitions of his own, whereas he should have rejected them because they were inconsistent with it. He further rejects the idea of a vacuum, and with it the atomic theory, entirely on *a priori* grounds, although, even in the then existing state of knowledge, atomism explained various phenomena in a perfectly rational manner which he could only explain by unmeaning or nonsensical phrases.¹ It had been already maintained, in his time, that the apparent movements of the heavenly bodies were due to the rotation of

¹ Compare the arguments in *Phys.*, iv. 9.

the earth on its own axis.¹ Had Aristotle accepted this theory one can imagine how highly his sagacity would have been extolled. We may, therefore, fairly take his rejection of it as a proof of blind adherence to old-fashioned opinions. When he argues that none of the heavenly bodies rotate, because we can see that the moon does not, as is evident from her always turning the same side to us,² nothing is needed but the simplest mathematics to demonstrate the fallacy of his reasoning. Others had surmised that the Milky Way was a collection of stars, and that comets were bodies of the same nature as planets. Aristotle is satisfied that both are appearances like meteors and the aurora borealis—caused by the friction of our atmosphere against the solid aether above it. A similar origin is ascribed to the heat and light derived from the sun and stars; for it would be derogatory to the dignity of those luminaries to suppose, with Anaxagoras, that they are formed of anything so familiar and perishable as fire. On the contrary, they consist of pure aether like the spheres on which they are fixed as protuberances; though how such an arrangement can co-exist with absolute contact between each sphere and that next below it, or how the effects of friction could be transmitted through such enormous thicknesses of solid crystal, is left unexplained.³ By a happy anticipation of Roemer, Empedocles conjectured that the transmission of light occupied a certain time: Aristotle declares it to be instantaneous.⁴

On passing to terrestrial physics, we find that Aristotle is, as usual, the dupe of superficial appearances, against which other thinkers were on their guard. Seeing that fire always moved up, he assumed that it did so by virtue of a natural tendency towards the circumference of the universe, as opposed to earth, which always moved towards the centre. The atomists correctly explained the ascent of heated particles by the pressure of surrounding matter, in accordance, most probably, with the analogy of floating bodies.⁵ Chemistry as a science is, of course, an entirely modern creation, but the first approach to it was made by Democritus; while no ancient philosopher stood farther from its essential principles than Aristotle. He analyses bodies, not into their material elements, but into the sensuous qualities, hot and cold, wet and dry, between which he supposes the

¹ The hypothesis of the earth's diurnal rotation had clearly been suggested by a celebrated passage in Plato's *Timæus*, though whether Plato himself held it is still doubtful. That he accepted the revolution of the celestial spheres is absolutely certain; but while to our minds the two beliefs are mutually exclusive, Grote thinks that Plato overlooked the inconsistency. It seems probable that the one was at first actually a generalisation from the other; it was thought that the earth must revolve because the crystal spheres revolved; then the new doctrine, thus accidentally struck out, was used by Aristarchus of Samos and others before him to destroy the old one.

² *De Cael.*, ii., 8, 290, a, 26.

⁴ *De Sens.*, vi., 446, a, 26.

³ Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 469.

⁵ *De Cael.*, i., 8, 277, b, 2.

underlying substance to be perpetually oscillating ; a theory which, if it were true, would make any fixed laws of nature impossible.

It might have been expected that, on reaching physiology, the Stagirite would stand on firmer ground than any of his contemporaries. Such, however, is not the case. As already observed, his achievements belong entirely to the dominion of anatomy and descriptive zoology. The whole internal economy of the animal body is, according to him, designed for the purpose of creating and moderating the vital heat ; and in apportioning their functions to the different organs he is entirely dominated by this fundamental error. It was a common notion among the Greeks, suggested by sufficiently obvious considerations, that the brain is the seat of the psychic activities. These, however, Aristotle transports to the heart, which, in his system, not only propels the blood through the body, but is also the source of heat, the common centre where the different special sensations meet to be compared, and the organ of imagination and of passion. The sole function of the brain is to cool down the blood—a purpose which the lungs also subserve. Some persons believe that air is a kind of food, and is inhaled in order to feed the internal fire ; but their theory would involve the absurd consequence that all animals breathe, for all have some heat. Anaxagoras and Diogenes did, indeed, make that assertion, and the latter even went so far as to say that fish breathe with their gills, absorbing the air held in solution by the water passed through them—a misapprehension, says Aristotle, which arose from not having studied the final cause of respiration.¹ His physiological theory of generation is equally unfortunate. In accordance with his metaphysical system, hereafter to be explained, he distinguishes two elements in the reproductive process, of which one, that contributed by the male, is exclusively formative ; and the other, that contributed by the female, exclusively material. The prevalent opinion was evidently, what we know now to be true, that each parent has both a formative and a material share in the composition of the embryo. Again, Aristotle, strangely enough, regards the generative element in both sexes as an unappropriated portion of the animal's nutriment, the last and most refined product of digestion, and therefore not a portion of the parental system at all ; while other biologists, anticipating Charles Darwin's theory of pangenesis in a very wonderful manner, taught that the semen is a conflux of molecules derived from every part of the body, and thus strove to account for the hereditary transmission of individual peculiarities to offspring.²

All these, however, are mere questions of detail. It is on

¹ *De Respir.*, i. and ii.

² *De Gen. An.*, i., 17.

a subject of the profoundest philosophical importance that Aristotle differs most consciously, most radically, and most fatally from his predecessors. They were evolutionists, and he was a stationarist. They were mechanists, and he was a teleologist. They were uniformitarians, and he was a dualist. It is true that, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Edwin Wallace makes him 'recognise the genesis of things by evolution and development,' but the meaning of this phrase requires to be cleared up. In one sense it is, of course, almost an identical proposition. The genesis of things must be by genesis of some kind or other. The great question is, what things have been evolved, and how have they been evolved? Modern science tells us, that not only have all particular aggregates of matter and motion now existing come into being within a finite period of time, but also that the specific types under which we arrange those aggregates have equally been generated; and that their characteristics, whether structural or functional, can only be understood by tracing out their origin and history. And it further teaches us that the properties of every aggregate result from the properties of its ultimate elements, which, within the limits of our experience, remain absolutely unchanged. Now, Aristotle taught very nearly the contrary of all this. He believed that the cosmos, as we now know it, had existed, and would continue to exist, unchanged through all eternity. The sun, moon, planets, and stars, together with the orbs containing them, are composed of an absolutely ungenerable, incorruptible substance. The earth, a cold, heavy, solid sphere, though liable to superficial changes, has always occupied its present position in the centre of the universe. The specific forms of animal life—except a few which are produced spontaneously—have, in like manner, been preserved unaltered through an infinite series of generations. Man shares the common lot. There is no continuous progress of civilisation. Every invention and discovery has been made and lost an infinite number of times. Our philosopher could not, of course, deny that individual living things come into existence and gradually grow to maturity; but he insists that their formation is teleologically determined by the parental type which they are striving to realise. He asks whether we should study a thing by examining how it grows, or by examining its completed form: and Wallace quotes the question without quoting the answer.¹ Aristotle tells us that the genetic method was followed by his predecessors, but that the other method is his. And he goes on to censure Empedocles for saying that many things in the animal body are due simply to mechanical causation; for example, the segmented structure of the backbone, which that

¹ *Outlines*, p. 30.

philosopher attributes to continued doubling and twisting—the very same explanation, I believe, that would be given of it by a modern evolutionist.¹ Finally, Aristotle assumes the only sort of transformation which we deny, and which Democritus equally denied—that is to say, the transformation of the ultimate elements into one another by the oscillation of an indeterminate matter between opposite qualities.

V

The truth is that while our philosopher had one of the most powerful intellects ever possessed by any man, it was an intellect strictly limited to the surface of things. He was utterly incapable of divining the hidden forces by which inorganic nature and life and human society are moved. He had neither the genius that can reconstruct the past, nor the genius that partly moulds, partly foretells the future. But wherever he has to observe or to report, to enumerate or to analyse, to describe or to define, to classify or to compare; and whatever be the subject, a mollusc or a mammal, a mouse or an elephant; the structure and habits of wild animals; the different stages in the development of an embryo bird; the variations of a single organ or function through the entire zoological series; the hierarchy of intellectual faculties; the laws of mental association; the specific types of virtuous character; the relation of equity to law; the relation of reason to impulse; the ideals of friendship; the different members of a household; the different orders in a State; the possible variations of political constitutions, or within the same constitution; the elements of dramatic or epic poetry; the modes of predication; the principles of definition, classification, judgment, and reasoning; the different systems of philosophy; all varieties of passion, all motives to action, all sources of conviction;—there we find an enormous accumulation of knowledge, an unwearied patience of research, a sweep of comprehension, a subtlety of discrimination, an accuracy of statement, an impartiality of decision, and an all-absorbing enthusiasm for science, which, if they do not raise him to the supreme level of creative genius, entitle him to rank a very little way below it.

It was natural that one who ranged with such consummate mastery over the whole world of apparent reality, should believe in no other reality; that for him truth should only mean the

¹ There is a passage in the *Politics* (i., 2, *sub. in.*) in which Aristotle distinctly inculcates the method of studying things by observing how they are first produced, and how they grow; but this is quite inconsistent with the more deliberate opinion referred to in the text (*De Part. An.*, i., 1, p. 640, a, 10). Perhaps, in writing the first book of the *Politics* he was more immediately under the influence of Plato, who preferred the old genetic method in practice, though not in theory.

systematisation of sense and language, of opinion and of thought. The visible order of nature was present to his imagination in such precise determination and fulness of detail that it resisted any attempt he might have made to conceive it under a different form. Each of his conclusions was supported by analogies from every other department of enquiry, because he carried the peculiar limitations of his thinking faculty with him wherever he turned, and unconsciously accommodated every subject to the framework which they imposed. The clearness of his ideas necessitated the use of sharply-drawn distinctions, which prevented the free play of generalisation and fruitful interchange of principles between the different sciences. And it will be shown hereafter that, when he attempted to combine rival theories, it was done by placing them in juxtaposition rather than by mutual interpenetration. Again, with his vivid perceptions, it was impossible for him to believe in the justification of any method claiming to supersede, or even to supplement, their authority. Hence he was hardly less opposed to the atomism of Democritus than to the scepticism of Protagoras or the idealism of Plato; the atoms were not visible. Hence, also, his dislike for all explanations which assumed that there were hidden processes at work below the surface of things, even taking surface in its most literal sense. Thus, in discussing the question why the sea is salt, he will not accept the theory that rivers dissolve out the salt from the strata through which they pass, and carry it down to the sea, because river-water tastes fresh; propounding in its stead the utterly false hypothesis of a dry saline evaporation from the earth's surface, which he supposes to be swept seawards by the wind.¹ Even in his own especial province of natural history the same tendency leads him astray. He asserts that the spider throws off its web from the surface of its body like a skin, instead of evolving it from within, as Democritus had taught.² The same thinker had endeavoured to prove by analogical reasoning that the invertebrate animals must have viscera, which only their extreme minuteness prevents us from perceiving; a view which his successor will not admit.³ In fact, wherever the line between the visible and the invisible is crossed, Aristotle's powers are suddenly paralysed, as if by enchantment.

Another circumstance which led Aristotle to disregard the happy aperçus of earlier philosophers was his vast superiority to them in positive knowledge. It never occurred to him that their sagacity might be greater than his, precisely because its exercise was less impeded by the labour of acquiring and

¹ *Meteor.*, ii., 3, 357, a, 15 ff.

² *Hist. An.*, ix., 39, *sub fin.*

³ *De Part. An.*, iii., 4, *sub in.*

retaining such immense masses of irrelevant facts. And his confidence was still further enhanced by the conviction that all previous systems were absorbed into his own, their scattered truths co-ordinated, their aberrations corrected, and their discords reconciled. But in striking a general average of existing philosophies, he was in reality bringing them back to that anonymous philosophy which is embodied in common language and common opinion. And if he afterwards ruled the minds of men with a more despotic sway than any other intellectual master, it was because he gave an organised expression to the principle of authority, which, if it could, would stereotype and perpetuate the existing types of civilisation and science for all time.

Here, then, are three main points of distinction between our philosopher and his precursors, the advantage being, so far, entirely on their side. He did not, like the Ionian physiologists, anticipate in outline our theories of evolution. He held that the cosmos had always been, by the strictest necessity, arranged in the same manner; the starry revolutions never changing; the four elements preserving a constant balance; the earth always solid; land and water always distributed according to their present proportions; living species transmitting the same unalterable type through an infinite series of generations; the human race enjoying an eternal duration, but from time to time losing all its conquests in some great physical catastrophe, and obliged to begin over again with the depressing consciousness that nothing could be devised which had not been thought of an infinite number of times already¹; the existing distinctions between Hellenes and barbarians, masters and slaves, men and women, grounded on everlasting necessities of nature. He did not, like Democritus, distinguish between objective and subjective properties of matter; nor admit that void space extends to infinity round the starry sphere, and honeycombs the objects which seem most incompressible and continuous to our senses. He did not hope, like Socrates, for the regeneration of the individual, nor, like Plato, for the regeneration of the race, by enlightened thought. It seemed as if Philosophy, abdicating her high function, and obstructing the paths which she had first opened, were now content to systematise the forces of prejudice, blindness, immobility, and despair.

For the restrictions under which Aristotle thought were

¹ For the eternity of the heavens see *De Caelo*, ii., 1; for the eternity of animal species, *De Gen. An.*, ii., 1, 731 b, 35 (the Index Aristotelicus refers by mistake to p. 732); for the eternal existence of the human race, *Pol.* iv. (viii.), 10, p. 1329 b, 27; for the infinite recurrence of the same opinions, *De Cael.*, i., 3, p. 270 b, 19 (where observe the emphasis laid on 'infinitely often'), and *Meteor.*, i., 3, p. 339 b, 27.

not determined by his personality alone ; they followed on the logical development of speculation, and would have imposed themselves on any other thinker equally capable of carrying that development to its predetermined goal. The Ionian search for a primary cause and substance of nature led to the distinction, made almost simultaneously, although from opposite points of view, by Heracleitus and Parmenides, between appearance and reality. From that distinction sprang the idea of mind, organised by Socrates into a systematic study of ethics and dialectics. Time and space, the necessary conditions of physical causality, were eliminated from a method having for its form the eternal relations of difference and resemblance, for its matter the present interests of humanity. Socrates taught that before enquiring whence things come we must first determine what it is they are. Hence he reduced science to the framing of exact definitions. Plato followed on the same track, and refused to answer a single question about anything until the subject of investigation had been clearly determined. But the form of causation had taken such a powerful hold on Greek thought, that it could not be immediately shaken off ; and Plato, as he devoted more and more attention to the material universe, saw himself compelled, like the older philosophers, to explain its construction by tracing out the history of its growth. What is even more significant, he applied the same method to ethics and politics, finding it easier to describe how the various virtues and types of social union came into existence, than to analyse and classify them as fixed ideas without reference to time. Again, while taking up the Eleatic antithesis of reality and appearance, and re-interpreting it as a distinction between noumena and phenomena, ideas and sensations, spirit and matter, he was impelled by the necessity of explaining himself, and by the actual limitations of experience to assimilate the two opposing series, or, at least, to view the fleeting, superficial images as a reflection and adumbration of the being which they concealed. And of all material objects, it seemed as if the heavenly bodies, with their orderly, unchanging movements, their clear brilliant light, and their remoteness from earthly impurities, best represented the philosopher's ideal. Thus, Plato, while on the one side he reaches back to the pre-Socratic age, on the other reaches forward to the Aristotelian system.

Nor was this all. As the world of sense was coming back into favour, the world of reason was falling into disrepute. Just as the old physical philosophy had been decomposed by the Sophisticism of Protagoras and Gorgias, so also the dialectic of Socrates was corrupted into the sophistry of Eubulides and Euthydêmus. Plato himself discovered that by reasoning deductively from purely abstract premises, contradictory

conclusions could be established with apparently equal force. It was difficult to see how a decision could be arrived at except by appealing to the testimony of sense. And a moral reform could hardly be effected except by similarly taking into account the existing beliefs and customs of mankind.

It seems possible to trace a similar evolution in the history of the Attic drama. The tragedies of Aeschylus resemble the old Ionian philosophy in this, that they are filled with material imagery, and that they deal with remote interests, remote times, and remote places. Sophocles withdraws his action into the subjective sphere, and simultaneously works out a pervading contrast between the illusions by which men are either lulled to false security or racked with needless anguish, and the terrible or consolatory reality to which they finally awaken. We have also, in his well-known irony, in the unconscious self-betrayal of his characters, that subtle evanescent allusiveness to a hidden truth, that gleaming of reality through appearance which constitutes, first the dialectic, then the mythical illustration, and finally the physics of Plato. In Aeschylus also we have the spectacle of sudden and violent vicissitudes, the abasement of insolent prosperity, and the punishment of long successful crime; only with him the characters which attract most interest are not the blind victims, but the accomplices or the confidants of destiny—the great figures of a Prometheus, a Darius, an Eteocles, a Clytemnestra, and a Cassandra, who are raised above the common level to an eminence where the secrets of past and future are unfolded to their gaze. Far otherwise with Sophocles. The leading actors in his most characteristic works, Oedipus, Electra, Dejanira, Ajax, and Philoctêtes, are surrounded by forces which they can neither control nor understand; moving in a world of illusion, if they help to work out their own destinies it is unconsciously, or even in direct opposition to their own designs.¹ Hence in Aeschylus we have something like that superb self-confidence which distinguishes a Heracleitus and a Parmenides; in Sophocles that confession of human ignorance which the Athenian philosophers made on their own behalf, or strove to extract from others. Euripides introduces us to another mode of thought, more akin to that which characterises Aristotle. For, although there is abundance of mystery in his tragedies, it has not the profound religious significance of the Sophoclean irony; he uses it rather for romantic and sentimental purposes, for the construction of an intricate plot, or for the creation of pathetic situations. His whole power is thrown into the immediate and detailed repre-

¹ This characterisation applies neither to the *Antigonê* nor to the *Oedipus in Colonus*, the first and the last extant dramas of Sophocles. The reason is that the one is still half Aeschylean, and the other distinctly an imitation of Euripides.

sentation of living passion, and of the surroundings in which it is displayed, without going far back into its historical antecedents like Aeschylus, or, like Sophocles, into the divine purposes that underlie it. On the other hand, as a Greek writer could not be other than philosophical, Euripides uses particular incidents as an occasion for wide generalisations and dialectical discussions; these, and not the idea of justice or of destiny, being the pedestal on which his figures are set. And it may be noticed as another curious coincidence that, like Aristotle again, he is disposed to criticise his predecessors, or at least one of them, Aeschylus, with some degree of asperity.

The critical tendency referred to suggests one more reason why philosophy, from having been a method of discovery, should at last become a mere method of description and arrangement. The materials accumulated by nearly three centuries of observation and reasoning were so enormous that they began to stifle the imaginative faculty. If there was any opening for originality it lay in the task of carrying order into this chaos by reducing it to a few general heads, by mapping out the whole field of knowledge, and subjecting each particular branch to the new-found processes of definition and classification. And along with the incapacity for framing new theories there arose a desire to diminish the number of those already existing, to frame, if possible, a system which should select and combine whatever was good in any or all of them.

VI

This, then, was the revolution effected by Aristotle, that he found Greek thought in the form of a solid, and unrolled it into a surface of the utmost possible tenuity, transparency, and extension. In so doing, he completed what Socrates and Plato had begun, he paralleled the course already described by Greek poetry, and he offered the first example of what since then has more than once recurred in the history of philosophy. It was thus that the residual substance of Locke and Berkeley was resolved into phenomenal succession by Hume. It was thus that the unexplained reality of Kant and Fichte was drawn out into a play of logical relations by Hegel. And it is thus that the limits imposed on human knowledge by positivists and agnostics in the last century, are yielding to the criticism of those who wish to establish either a perfect identity or a perfect equation between consciousness and being. Indeed, long before the end of the nineteenth century this position found itself represented from various points of view, in England by the neo-Hegelians, by Shadworth Hodgson, and by G. H. Lewes; in France by

Taine and Renouvier, as well as more recently by M. Bergson ; and in Germany by Nietzsche.¹

The systematising power of Aristotle, his faculty for bringing the isolated parts of a surface into co-ordination and continuity, is apparent even in those sciences with whose material truths he was utterly unacquainted. Apart from the falseness of their fundamental assumptions, his scientific treatises are, for their time, masterpieces of method. In this respect they far surpass his moral and metaphysical works, and they are also written in a much more vigorous style, occasionally even rising into eloquence. He evidently moves with much more assurance on the solid ground of external nature than in the cloudland of Platonic dialectics, or among the possibilities of an ideal morality. If, for example, we open his *Physics*, we shall find such notions as Causation, Infinity, Matter, Space, Time, Motion, and Force, for the first time in history separately discussed, defined, and made the foundation of natural philosophy. The treatise *On the Heavens* very properly regards the celestial movements as a purely mechanical problem, and strives throughout to bring theory and practice into complete agreement. While directly contradicting the truths of modern astronomy, it stands on the same ground with them ; and anyone who had mastered it would be far better prepared to receive those truths than if he were only acquainted with such a work as Plato's *Timaeus*. The remaining portions of Aristotle's scientific encyclopaedia follow in perfect logical order, and correspond very nearly to Auguste Comte's classification, if, indeed, they did not directly or indirectly suggest it. We cannot, however, view the labours of Aristotle with unmixed satisfaction until he comes on to deal with the provinces of natural history, comparative anatomy, and comparative psychology. Here the subject exactly suited the comprehensive observation and systematising formalism in which he excelled. Here, accordingly, not only the method but the matter of his teaching is good. In theorising about the causes of phenomena he was behind the best science of his age ; in dissecting the phenomena themselves he was far before it. Of course very much of what he tells was learned at second-hand, and some of it is not authentic. But to collect such masses of information from the reports of uneducated hunters, fishermen, grooms, shepherds, beemasters, and the like, required an extraordinary power of putting pertinent questions, such as could only be acquired in the school of Socratic dialectic. Nor should we omit to notice the vivid

¹ Compare the memorable declaration of Sir Frederick Pollock : 'To me it amounts to a contradiction in terms to speak of unknowable existence or unknowable reality in an absolute sense. I cannot tell what existence means if not the possibility of being known or perceived.'—*Spinoza*, p. 163.

intelligence which enabled even ordinary Greeks to supply him with the facts required for his generalisations. But some of his most important researches must be entirely original. For instance, he must have traced the development of the embryo chicken with his own eyes; and, here, we have it on good authority that his observations are remarkable for their accuracy, in a field where accuracy, according to Caspar Friedrich Wolff, is almost impossible.¹

Still more important than these observations themselves is the great truth he derives from them—since rediscovered and worked out in detail by v. Baer—that in the development of each individual the generic characters make their appearance before the specific characters.² Nor is this a mere accidental or isolated remark, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, it is intimately connected with one of the philosopher's metaphysical theories. Although not an evolutionist, he has made other contributions to biology, the importance of which has been first realised in the light of the evolution theory. Thus he notices the antagonism between individuation and reproduction;³ the connexion of increased size and animal heat with increased vitality;⁴ the connexion of greater intelligence, with increased complexity of structure;⁵ the physiological division of labour in the higher animals;⁶ the formation of heterogeneous organs out of homogeneous tissues;⁷ the tendency towards greater centralisation in the higher organisms⁸—a remark connected with his two great anatomical discoveries, the central position of the heart in the vascular system, and the possession of a backbone by all red-blooded animals;⁹ the resemblance of animal intelligence to a rudimentary human intelligence, especially as manifested in children;¹⁰ and, finally, he attempts to trace a continuous series of gradations connecting the inorganic with the organic world, plants with animals, and the lower animals with man.¹¹

The last-mentioned principle gives one more illustration of the distinction between Aristotle's system and that of the evolutionist properly so called. The continuity recognised by Aristotle only obtains among a number of coexisting types; it is a purely logical or ideal arrangement, facilitating the acquisition and retention of knowledge, but adding nothing to

¹ *Aristoteles von d. Zeugung u. Entwicklung d. Thiere.* Aubert u. Wimmer, Einleitung, p. 15.

² *De Gen. An.*, ii., 3, 736, b, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, i., 18, 725, b, 25.

⁵ *De Part. An.*, ii., 10, 656, a, 4.

⁴ *De Respir.*, 13, 477, a, 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, iv., 6, 683, a, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ii., 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, iv., 5, 682, a, 8; *De Long.*, vi., 467, a, 18; *De Ingress. An.*, vii., 707, a, 24.

⁹ *Hist. An.*, i., 4, 489, a, 30 sqq.; *De Part. An.*, ii., 9, 654, b, 11; Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*,

ii., 2, p. 522.

¹⁰ *Hist. An.*, viii., 1, sub in.

¹¹ Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

its real content. The continuity of the evolutionist implies a causal connexion between successive types evolved from each other by the action of mechanical forces. Moreover, our modern theory, while accounting for whatever is true in Aristotle's conception, serves, at the same time, to correct its exaggeration. The totality of existing species only imperfectly fill up the interval between the highest human life and the inorganic matter from which we assume it to be derived, because they are collaterally and not lineally related. Probably no one of them corresponds to any less developed stage of another, although some have preserved, with more constancy than others, the features of a common parent. In diverging from a single stock (if we accept the monogenetic hypothesis), they have become separated by considerable spaces, which the innumerable multitude of extinct species alone could fill up.

Our preliminary survey of the subject is now completed. So far, we have been engaged in studying the mind of Aristotle rather than his system of philosophy. In the next chapter I shall attempt to give a more complete account of that system in its internal organisation not less than in its relations to modern science and modern thought.

CHAPTER IX

THE SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHY OF ARISTOTLE

I

WE have considered the Aristotelian philosophy in relation to the great concrete interests of life, morals, politics, literature, and science. We have now to ask what it has to tell us about the deepest and gravest problems of all, the first principles of Being and Knowing, God and the soul, spirit and matter, metaphysics, psychology, and logic. Very high claims have been advanced on behalf of Aristotle in respect to his treatment of these topics; and to begin with them, would only have been to follow the usual example of his expositors. I have, however, preferred keeping them to the last, that my readers might acquire some familiarity with the Aristotelian method, by seeing it applied to subjects where the results are immediately intelligible, and can be tested by an appeal to the experience of twenty-two centuries. I know that there are some who will demur to this proceeding, who will say that Aristotle the metaphysician stands on quite different ground from Aristotle the man of science, because in the one capacity he had, and in the other capacity he had not, sufficient facts to warrant an authoritative conclusion. As against such interpreters I will endeavour to show that there is a unity of composition running through the Stagirite's entire labours, that they everywhere manifest the same excellences and the same defects, which are those of an anatomising, critical, descriptive, classificatory genius; that his most important conclusions, however great their historical interest, are without any positive or even educational value for us, being almost entirely based on false physical assumptions; that his ontology and psychology are not what his admirers suppose them to be; and that his logic, though meriting our gratitude, is far too confused and incomplete to throw any light on the questions raised by modern thinkers.

Here, as elsewhere, the genetic method of investigation will be employed. Aristotle's writings do not, indeed, present that gradual development of ideas which makes the Platonic dialogues so interesting. Still they exhibit traces of such a

development, and the most important among them seems to have been compiled from notes taken by the philosopher before his conclusions were definitely reasoned out, or worked up into a consistent whole. It is this fragmentary collection which, from having been placed by Andronicus, who edited Aristotle's writings in the first century B.C., after the master's treatises on natural science, has received a name still associated with every kind of speculation that cannot be tested by a direct or indirect appeal to the evidence of external sense.

Whether there exist any realities beyond what are revealed to us by this evidence, and what sensible evidence itself may be worth, were problems already actively canvassed in Aristotle's time. His *Metaphysics* at once takes us into the thick of the debate. The first question of that age was, What are the causes and principles of things? On one side stood the materialists—the old Ionian physicists and their living representatives. They said that all things came from water, air, fire, or earth in a form of minute subdivision, or from a mixture of the four elements, or from the interaction of opposites, such as wet and dry, hot and cold. Aristotle, following in the track of his master, Plato, blames them for ignoring the incorporeal substances, by which he does not mean what would now be understood—feelings or states of consciousness, or even the spiritual substratum of consciousness—but rather the general conceptions which remain constant amid the fluctuations of sensible phenomena; considered, let us observe, not as subjective thoughts, but as objective realities. Another deficiency in the older physical theories is that they either ignore the efficient cause of motion altogether (like Thales), or assign causes not adequate to the purpose (like Empedocles); or when they hit on the true cause do not make the right use of it (like Anaxagoras). Lastly, they have omitted to study the final cause of a thing—the good for which it exists.

The teleology of Aristotle requires a word of explanation, which may appropriately find its place in the present connexion. In speaking of a purpose in nature, he does not mean that natural productions subserve an end lying outside themselves; as if, to use Goethe's illustration, the bark of cork-trees was intended to be made into stoppers for ginger-beer bottles; but that in every perfect thing the parts are interdependent, and exist for the sake of the whole to which they belong. Nor does he, like so many theologians, both ancient and modern, argue from the evidence of design in nature to the operation of a designing intelligence outside her. Not believing in any creation at all apart from works of art, he could not believe in a creative intelligence other than that of man. He does, indeed, constantly speak of nature as if she were a personal providence, continually

exerting herself for the good of her creatures. But, on looking a little closer, we find that the agency in question is completely unconscious, and may be identified with the constitution of each particular thing, or rather of the type to which it belongs. We have seen that Aristotle's intellect was essentially descriptive, and we have here another illustration of its characteristic quality. The teleology which he parades with so much pomp adds nothing to our knowledge of causes, implies nothing that a positivist would not readily accept. It is a mere study of functions, an analysis of statical relations. Of course, if there were really any philosophers who said that the connexion between teeth and mastication was entirely accidental, the Aristotelian doctrine was a useful protest against such an absurdity; but when we have established a fixed connexion between organ and function, we are bound to explain the association in some more satisfactory manner than by reaffirming it in general terms, which is all that Aristotle ever does. Again, whatever may be the relative justification of teleology as a study of functions in the living body, we have no grounds for interpreting the phenomena of inorganic nature on an analogous principle. Some Greek philosophers were acute enough to perceive the distinction. While admitting that plants and animals showed traces of design, they held that the heavenly bodies arose spontaneously from the movements of a vortex or some such cause;¹ just as certain religious savants of our own day reject the Darwinian theory while accepting the nebular hypothesis.² But to Aristotle the unbroken regularity of the celestial movements, which to us is the best proof of their purely mechanical nature, was, on the contrary, a proof that they were produced and directed by an absolutely reasonable purpose; much more so indeed than terrestrial organisms, marked as these are by occasional deviations and imperfections; and he concludes that each of those movements must be directed towards the attainment of some correspondingly consummate end;³ while, again, in dealing with those precursors of Darwin, if such they can be called, who argued that the utility of an organ does not disprove its spontaneous origin, since only the creatures which, by a happy accident, came to possess it would survive⁴—he answers that the constant reproduction of such organs is enough to vindicate them from being the work of chance;⁵ thus displaying his inability to distinguish between the two ideas of uniform causation and design.

¹ *Phys.*, ii., 8, p. 198, b, 24.

² The late Father Secchi, for example.

³ *Phys.*, ii., 4, p. 196, a, 28; *De Cael.*, ii., 12.

⁴ Darwin himself strangely attributes this speculation to Aristotle instead of to the naturalists whom he was criticising (*Origin of Species*, ed. 1897, vol. i., p. xiii.).

⁵ *Phys.*, ii., 8, p. 199, b, 14.

As a result of the foregoing criticism, Aristotle distinguishes four different causes or principles by which all things are determined to be what they are—Matter, Form, Agent, and Purpose.¹ If, for example, we take a saw, the matter is steel ; the form, a toothed blade ; the agent or cause of its assuming that shape, a smith ; the purpose, to divide wood or stone. When we have enumerated these four principles, we have told everything that can be known about a saw. But Aristotle could not keep the last three separate ; he gradually extended the definition of form until it absorbed, or became identified with, agent and purpose.² It was what we should call the idea of function that facilitated the transition. If the very essence or nature of a saw implies use, activity, movement, how can we define it without telling its purpose ? The toothed blade is only intelligible as a cutting, dividing instrument. Again, how came the saw into being ? What shaped the steel into that particular form ? We have said that it was the smith. But surely that is too vague. The smith is a man, and may be able to exercise other trades as well. Suppose him to be a musician, did he make the saw in that capacity ? No ; and here comes in a distinction which plays an immense part in Aristotle's metaphysics, whence it has passed into our every-day speech. He does not make the saw *quâ* musician but *quâ* smith. He can, however, in the exercise of his trade as smith make many other tools—knives, axes, and so forth. Nevertheless, had he only learned to make saws it would be enough. Therefore, he does not make the saw *quâ* axe-maker, he makes it *quâ* saw-maker. Nor, again, does he make it with his whole mind and body, but only with just those thoughts and movements required to give the steel that particular shape. Now, what are these thoughts but the idea of a saw present in his mind and passing through his eyes and hands, till it fixes itself on the steel ? The immaterial form of a saw creates the real saw which we use. Let us apply the preceding analogies to a natural object ; for example, a man. What is the Form, the definition of a man ? Not a being possessing a certain outward shape, for then a marble statue would be a man, which it is not ; nor yet a certain assemblage of organs, for then a corpse would be a man, which, according to Aristotle, criticising Democritus, it is not ; but a living, feeling, and reasoning being, the end of whose existence is to fulfil all the functions involved in this definition. So, also, the creative cause of a man is another man, who directly impresses the human form on the material

¹ *Metaph.*, i., 3, *sub in.* ; *An. Post.*, ii., 11, *sub in.* (Bekker) ; *Phys.*, ii., 3 ; *De Gen. An.*, i., 1.

² *Metaph.*, viii., 4, p. 1044, b, 1 ; *De Gen. An.*, i., 1, p. 715, a, 6 ; *ib.* ii., 1, p. 732, a, 4 ; *Phys.*, ii., 7, p. 198, a, 24.

supplied by the female organism. In the same way, every definite individual aggregate becomes what it is through the agency of another individual representing the same type in its perfect manifestation.¹

The substantial forms of Aristotle, combining as they do the notion of a definition with that of a moving cause and a fulfilled purpose, are evidently derived from the Platonic Ideas; a reflection which at once leads us to consider the relation in which he stands to the spiritualism of Plato and to the mathematical idealism of the Neo-Pythagoreans. He agrees with them in thinking that general conceptions are the sole object of knowledge—the sole enduring reality in a world of change. He differs from them—or supposes that he differs—in maintaining that such conceptions have no existence apart from the particulars in which they reside. It has been questioned whether Aristotle ever really understood his master's teaching on the subject. The tendency of criticism for the last generation has been to maintain, with ever-increasing decision, that he did not. At the same time there seems good reason to believe that Plato's successors in the Academy continued to uphold with vehemence their master's original theory—for such we must suppose it to have been—that the Ideas had a transcendent existence beyond time and space and outside the mind of any thinking being. And as against these Platonists Aristotle is entirely right. His most powerful arguments are not, indeed, original, having been anticipated by Plato himself; but as they were left unanswered he had a perfect right to repeat them, and his dialectical skill was great enough to make him independent of their support. The extreme minuteness of his criticism is wearisome to us, who can hardly conceive how another opinion could ever have been held. Yet such was the fascination exercised by Plato's misunderstood idealism, that not only was it upheld with considerable acrimony by his immediate followers,² but under one form or another it has been revived over and over again, in the long period which has elapsed since its first promulgation, and on every one of these occasions the arguments of Aristotle have been raised up again to meet it, each time with triumphant success. Ockham's razor, *Entia non sunt praeter necessitatem multiplicanda*, is borrowed from the *Metaphysics*; Locke's principal objection to innate ideas closely resembles the sarcastic observation in the last chapter of the *Posterior Analytics*, that, according to Plato's theory, we must have some very wonderful knowledge of which we are not

¹ *Phys.*, ii., 3, p. 195, a, 32 sqq.; *Metaph.*, ix. 8, p. 1049, b, 24.

² As we may infer from a passage in the *Rhetoric* (ii., 2, p. 1379, a, 35), where partisans of the Idea are said to be exasperated by any slight thrown on their favourite doctrine.

conscious.¹ And the weapons with which Trendelenburg and others have waged war on Hegel are avowedly drawn from the Aristotelian arsenal.²

In his criticism on the ideal theory, Aristotle argues that it is unproved; that the consequences to which it leads would be rejected by the idealists themselves; that it involves a needless addition to the sum of existence; that it neither explains the origin of things nor helps us to understand them, while taking away from them their substantial reality; that the Ideas are merely sensible objects hypostasised, like the anthropomorphic divinities of primitive men; that, to speak of them as patterns, in whose likeness the world was created, is a mere idle metaphor; that, even assuming the existence of such patterns, each individual must be made in the likeness, not of one, but of many ideas—a human being, for instance, must be modelled after the ideal biped and the ideal animal, as well as after the ideal man; while many of the ideas themselves, although all are supposed to exist absolutely, must be dependent on other and simpler types; finally, that, assuming an idea for every abstract relation, there must be ideas to represent the relation between every sensible object and its prototype, others for the new relations thus introduced, and so on to infinity.

Aristotle's objections to the Neo-Pythagorean theory of ideal numbers need not delay us here. They are partly a repetition of those brought against the Platonic doctrine in its original form, partly derived from the impossibility of identifying qualitative with quantitative differences.³

Such arguments manifestly tell not only against Platonism, but against every kind of transcendental realism, from the natural theology of Paley to the dogmatic agnosticism of Herbert Spencer. A modern Aristotle might say that the hypothesis of a creative first cause, personal or otherwise, logically involves the assumption of as many original specific energies as there are qualities to be accounted for, and thus gives us the unnecessary trouble of counting everything twice over; that every difficulty and contradiction from which the transcendental assumption is intended to free us, must, on analysis, reappear in the assumption itself—for example, the God who is to deliver us from evil must be himself conceived as the creator of evil; that the infinite and absolute can neither

¹ Repeated in the *Metaphysics*, i., 9, p. 993, a, 1.

² This may seem inconsistent with my former assertion, that Hegel holds in German philosophy a place analogous to that held by Aristotle in Greek philosophy. Such analogies, however, are always more or less incomplete; and, so far as he attributes a self-moving power to ideas, Hegel is a Platonist rather than an Aristotelian. Similarly, as an evolutionist, Herbert Spencer stands much nearer to early Greek thought than to Aristotle, whom, in other respects, he so much resembles.

³ Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, vol. ii., 2, pp. 297 sq.

cause, nor be apprehended by, the finite and relative ; that to separate from nature all the forces required for its perpetuation, and relegate them to a sphere apart, is a false antithesis and a sterile abstraction ; lastly, that causation, whether efficient or final, once begun, cannot stop ; that if this world is not self-existing, nothing is ; that the mutual adaptation of thoughts in a designing intelligence requires to be accounted for just like any other adaptation ; that if the relative involves the absolute, so also does the relation between the two involve another absolute, and so on to infinity.

These are difficulties which will continue to perplex us until every shred of the old metaphysics has been thrown off. To that task Aristotle was not equal. He was profoundly influenced by the very theory against which he contended ; and, at the risk of being paradoxical, one may even say that it assumed a greater importance in his system than had ever been attributed to it by Plato himself. To prove this, we must resume the thread of our exposition, and follow the Stagirite still further in his analysis of that fundamental reality with which the highest philosophy is concerned.

II

Ever since the age of Heracleitus and Parmenides, Greek thought had been haunted by a pervading dualism which each system had in turn attempted to reconcile, with no better result than its reproduction under altered names. And speculation had latterly become still further perplexed by the question whether the antithetical couples supposed to divide all nature between them could or could not be reduced to so many aspects of a single opposition. In discussing Plato's metaphysics it was shown that there were four such competing pairs—Being and Not-Being, the One and the Many, the Same and the Other, Rest and Motion. Plato employed his very subtlest dialectic in tracing out their connexions, readjusting their relationships, and diminishing the total number of terms which they involved. In what was probably his last great speculative effort, the *Timæus*, he selected Sameness and Difference as the couple best adapted to bear the heaviest strain of thought. Perhaps in his spoken lectures he followed the Pythagorean system more closely, giving the preference to the One and the Many ; or he may have employed the two expressions indifferently. The antithesis of Identity and Difference would sooner commend itself to a dialectician, the antithesis of Unity and Plurality to a mathematician. Aristotle was both, but he was before all

things a naturalist. As such, the antithesis of Being and Not-Being, to which Plato attached little or no value, suited him best. Accordingly, he proceeds to work it out with a clearness before unknown in Greek philosophy. The first and surest of all principles, he declares, is, that a thing cannot both be and not be, in the same sense of the words, and furthermore that it must either be or not be. Subsequent logicians prefixed to these axioms another, declaring that whatever is is. The three together are known as the laws of Identity, Contradiction, and Excluded Middle. By all, except Hegelians, they are recognised as the highest laws of thought; and even Hegel was indebted to them, through Fichte, for the ground-plan of his entire system.¹

The whole meaning and value of such excessively abstract propositions must lie in their application to the problems which they are employed to solve. Aristotle made at once too much and too little use of his axioms. Too much—for he employed them to refute doctrines not really involving any logical inconsistency—the theory of Heracleitus, that everything is in motion; the theory of Anaxagoras, that everything was originally confused together; the theory of Protagoras, that man is the measure of all things. Too little—for he admitted a sphere of possibilities where logical definition did not apply, and where subjects simultaneously possessed the capacity of taking on one or other of two contradictory attributes.

Nor is this all. After sharply distinguishing what is from what is not, and refusing to admit any intermediary between them, Aristotle proceeds to discover such an intermediary in the shape of what he calls Accidental Predication.² An accident is an attribute not necessarily or usually inhering in its subject—in other words, a co-existence not dependent on causation. Aristotle could never distinguish between the two notions of cause and kind, nor yet between interferences with the action of some particular cause and exceptions to the law of causation in general; and so he could not frame an intelligible theory of chance. Some propositions, he tells us, are necessarily true, others are only generally true; and it is the exceptions to the latter which constitute accident; as, for instance, when a cold day happens to come in the middle of summer. So also a man is necessarily an animal, but only exceptionally white. Such distinctions are not uninteresting, for they prove with what difficulties the idea of invariable sequence had to contend before even the highest intellects could grasp it. There was a constant liability to confound the order of succession with the order of co-existence, the order of our sensations with the order of objective existence, and the subjection of human actions to any

¹ *Metaph.*, iv., 3 and 8.

² *Ibid.*, vi., 2, p. 1026, b, 21.

fixed order, with the impossibility of deliberation and choice. The earlier Greek thinkers had proclaimed that all things existed by necessity; but with their purely geometrical or historical point of view, they entirely ignored the more complex questions raised by theories about classification, logical attribution, and moral responsibility. And the modifications introduced by Epicurus, into the old physics, show us how unanswerable Aristotle's reasonings seemed to some of his ablest successors.

Absolute being is next distinguished from truth, which, we are told, has no objective existence¹—a remarkable declaration, which throws much light on other parts of the Aristotelian system, and to which we shall subsequently return.²

After explaining at considerable length what Being is not, Aristotle now proceeds to ascertain what it is. He tells us that just as all number *quâ* number must be either odd or even, so all Being *quâ* Being must have certain universal attributes. These he sets himself to discover. When Descartes long afterwards entered on a somewhat similar enquiry, he fell back on the facts of his own individual consciousness. Aristotle, on the contrary, appeals to the common consciousness of mankind as embodied in ordinary language. In how many senses do we say that a thing is? The first answer is contained in his famous Ten Categories.³ These are not what some have supposed them to be, *summa genera* of existence, but *summa genera* of predication. In other words, they are not a classification of things, but of the information which it is possible to receive about a single thing, more especially about the richest and most concrete thing known to us—a human being. If we want to find out all about a thing we ask, What is it? Of what sort? How large? To what is it related? Where and when can we find it? What does it do? What happens to it? And if the object of our investigations be a living thing, we may add, What are its habits and dispositions? The question has been raised, how Aristotle came to think of these ten particular categories, and a wonderful amount of rubbish has been written on the subject, while apparently no scholar could see what was staring him in the face all the time, that Aristotle got them by collecting all the simple forms of interrogation supplied by the Greek language,⁴ and writing out their most general expressions.

¹ *Metaph.*, vi., 4, p. 1027, b, 29.

² *Ibid.*, vi., 4.

³ *Ibid.*, vi., 2, *sub in.*; vii., 1, *sub in.*; *Topic*, i., 9.

⁴ These are *τί, ποῖόν, ποσόν, ποῦ, ποτέ*, and *πῶς*. *Τί* is associated with *πρός* in the question *πρός τί*, which has no simple English equivalent. Apparently it was suggested to Aristotle by *ποσόν*, how much? in connexion with which it means, in relation to what standard? If we were told that a thing was double, we should ask, double what? Again, the Greeks had a simply compound question, *τί παθόν*, meaning, what was the matter with him? or, what made him do it? From this Aristotle extracted *πάσχειν*, a wider notion than our passion, meaning whatever is

Having obtained his categories, Aristotle proceeds to mark off the first from the other nine. The subject or substance named in answer to the question, What is it? can exist without having any quality, size, and so forth predicated of it; but they cannot exist without it. Logically, the categories cannot be defined without telling *what* they are; really they cannot be conceived without something not themselves in which they inhere. They are like the tail of a kite, giving greater conspicuousness and buoyancy to the body, but entirely dependent on it for support. What our philosopher fails to perceive is, that the dependence is reciprocal, that substance can no more be conceived without attributes than attributes without substance; or rather that substance, like all other categories, can be resolved into Relation.¹

Meanwhile, he had a logical machine ready to hand, which could be used with terrible effect against the Platonic Ideas. Any of these—and there were a great number—that could be brought under one of the last nine categories were at once deprived of all claim to independent existence. Take Equality, for instance. It cannot be discovered outside quantity, and quantity is always predicated of a substance. And the same is true of number, to the utter destruction of the Neo-Pythagorean theory which gave it a separate existence. Moreover, the categories served not only to generalise and combine, but also to specificate and divide. The idea of motion occurs in three of them; in quantity, where it means increase or diminution; in quality, where it means alteration, as from hot to cold, or *vice versa*; and in place, implying transport from one point to another. The Idea of Good, which stands at the very summit of Plato's system, may be traced through all ten categories.² Thus, the supposed unity and simplicity of such conceptions was shown to be an illusion. Platonism was, in truth, so inconsistent with the notions embodied in common language, that it could not but be condemned by a logic based on those notions.

Aristotle next takes the Idea of Substance and subjects it to a fresh analysis.³ Of all things none seem to possess so evident an existence as the bodies about us—plants and animals, the four elements, and the stars. But each of these has already

done to or happens to anything; which again would suggest *ποιεῖν*, what it does. Finally, *πῶς*, taken alone, is too vague a question for any answer, but must be taken in its simplest compounds *πῶς διακείμενον* and *πῶς ἔχον*, which give the two rarely-occurring categories *ἔχειν* and *κεῖσθαι*, for which it is on one occasion substituted (*Soph. El.*, xxii., p. 178, b, 39). *Διὰ τί* does not figure among the categories, because it is reserved for the special analysis of *οὐσία*.

¹ As Grote has shown in his chapter on the Categories.

² *Eth. Nic.*, i. 4, p. 1096, a, 24, where six are enumerated.

³ *Metaph.*, vii. *passim*.

been shown to consist of Form and Matter. A statue, for instance, is a lump of bronze shaped into the figure of a man. Of these two constituents, Matter seems at first sight to possess the greater reality. The same line of thought which led Aristotle to place substance before the other categories now threatens to drive him back into materialism. This he dreaded, not on sentimental or religious grounds, but because he conceived it to be the negation of knowledge. He first shows that Matter cannot be the real substance to which individuals owe their determinate existence, since it is merely the unknown residuum left behind when every predicate, common to them with others, has been stripped off. Substance, then, must be either Form alone or Form combined with Matter. Form, in its completest sense, is equivalent to the essential definition of a thing—the collection of attributes together constituting its essence or conception. To know the definition is to know the thing defined. The way to define is to begin with the most general notion, and proceed by adding one specific difference after another, until we reach the most particular and concrete expression. The union of this last with a certain portion of Matter gives us the individual Socrates or Callias. There are no real entities (as the Platonists pretend) corresponding to the successive stages of generalisation, biped, animal, and so forth, any more than there are self-existing quantities, qualities, and relations. Thus the problem has been driven into narrower and narrower limits, until at last we are left with the *infimæ species* and the individuals contained under them. It remains to discover in what relation these stand to one another. The answer is unsatisfactory. We are told that there is no definition of individuals, and also that the definition is identical with the individual.¹ Such, indeed, is the conclusion necessarily resulting from Aristotle's repeated declarations that all knowledge is of definitions, that all knowledge is of something really existing, and that nothing really exists but individual things. Nevertheless, against these we have to set equally strong declarations to the effect that knowledge is of something general, not of the perishing individuals which may pass out of existence at any moment. The truth is, that we are here, as Zeller has shown,² in presence of an insoluble contradiction, and we must try to explain, not how Aristotle reconciled it with itself, for that was impossible, but how he reconciled himself to it.

His analysis of individuality was the first step in this direction. We have seen that he treats definition as a process of gradual specification, beginning with the most general notions, and working down by successive differentiations to the most

¹ *Metaph.*, vii., 6, p. 1031, b, 18 sqq.

² Zeller, *Phil. d. Gr.*, ii., 2, p. 309.

particular. Now, the completed conception is itself the integration of all these differences, the bond of union holding them together. Turning to an antithetical order of ideas, to the material substance of which bodies are composed, and its various transformations, we find him working out the same vein of thought. According to the Aristotelian chemistry, an ultimate indeterminate unknowable something clothes itself with one or other of the opposing attributes, dry and moist, hot and cold; and when two of these are combined, it manifests itself to our senses as one of the four elements. The elements combine in a particular manner to form homogeneous animal tissues, and these again are united into heterogeneous organs, which together constitute the living body. Here, then, we have two analogous series of specifications—one conceptual and leading down from the abstract to the concrete, the other physical, and leading up from the vague, the simple, and the homogeneous, to the definite, the complex, and the heterogeneous. Aristotle embraces both processes under a single comprehensive generalisation. He describes each of them as the continuous conversion of a possibility into an actuality. For the sake of greater clearness, let us take the liberty of substituting modern scientific terms for his cumbrous and obsolete classifications. We shall then say that the general notion, living thing, contains under it the two less general notions—plant and animal. If we only know of any given object that it has life, there is implied the possibility of its being either the one or the other, but not both together. On determining it to be (say) an animal, we actualise one of the possibilities. But the actualisation is only relative, and immediately becomes the possibility of being either a vertebrate or an invertebrate animal. The actuality vertebrate becomes the possibility of viviparous or oviparous, and so on through successive differentiations until we come (say) to a man. Now let us begin at the material end. Here are a mass of molecules, which, in their actual state are only carbon, nitrogen, and so forth. But they are potential starch, fibrin, water, or any other article of food that might be named; for under favourable conditions they will combine to form it. Once actualised as such, they are possible blood-cells; these are possible tissues; these, again, possible organs, and lastly we come to the consensus of vital functions, which is a man. What the raw material is to the finished product, that are the parts to the entire organism, the elements to the compound, the genus to the species, and such in its very widest sense is potency to realisation, δύναμις to ἐντελέχεια, throughout the universe of growth and decay.¹

¹ For the general theory of Actuality and Possibility, see *Metaph.*, bk. viii.

It will be observed that, so far, this famous theory does not add one single jot to our knowledge. Under the guise of an explanation, it is a description of the very facts needing to be explained. We did not want an Aristotle to tell us that before a thing exists it must be possible. We want to know *how* it is possible, what are the real conditions of its existence, and why they combine at a particular moment to produce it. The Atomists showed in what direction the solution should be sought, and all subsequent progress has been due to a development of their method.

I have said, in comparing him with his predecessors, that the Stagirite unrolled Greek thought from a solid into a continuous surface. I have now to add that he gave his surface the false appearance of a solid by the use of shadows, and of aerial perspective. In other words, he made the indication of his own ignorance and confusion do duty for depth and distance. For to say that a thing is developed out of its possibility, merely means that it is developed out of something, the nature of which we do not know. And to speak about such possibilities as imperfect existences, or matter, or whatever else Aristotle may be pleased to call them, is simply constructing the universe, not out of our ideas, but out of our absolute want of ideas.

We have seen how, for the antithesis between Form and Matter, was substituted the wider antithesis between Actuality and Possibility. Even in this latter the opposition is more apparent than real. A permanent possibility is only intelligible through the idea of its realisation, and sooner or later is certain to be realised. Aristotle still further bridges over the interval between them by a new conception—that of motion. Motion, he tells us, is the process of realisation, the transformation of power into act. Nearly the whole of his *Physics* is occupied with an enquiry into its nature and origin. As first conceived, it is equivalent to what we call change rather than to mechanical movement. The table of categories supplies an exhaustive enumeration of its varieties. These are, as has been already mentioned, alteration of quality or transformation, increase or decrease of quantity, equivalent to growth and decay, and transport from place to place. Sometimes a fourth variety is added, derived from the first category, substance. He calls it generation and destruction, the coming into existence or passing out of it again. A careful analysis shows that motion in space is the primordial change on which all others depend for their accomplishment. To account for it is the most vitally important problem in philosophy.

III

Before entering on the chain of reasoning which led Aristotle to postulate the existence of a personal First Cause, we must explain the difference between his scientific standpoint, and that which is now accepted by all educated minds. To him the eternity not only of Matter, but also of what he called Form,—that is to say, the collection of attributes giving definiteness to natural aggregates, more especially those known as organic species—was an axiomatic certainty. Every type, capable of self-propagation, that could exist at all, had existed, and would continue to exist for ever. For this, no explanation beyond the generative power of nature was required. But when he had to account for the machinery by which the perpetual alternation of birth and death below, and the changeless revolutions of the celestial spheres above the moon were preserved, difficulties arose. He had reduced every other change to transport through space; and with regard to this his conceptions were entirely mistaken. He believed that moving matter tended to stop unless it was sustained by some external force; and this was the conclusion naturally suggested by sensible experience. The sparks were seen to fly upward; but as all bodies seemed to be converted into fire at some stage of their existence, there must be some limit to this process of radiation, or the world would long since have vanished into space. Earthy matter fell downwards; but the most recent astronomical discoveries, demonstrating as they did the earth's sphericity, plainly indicated that this movement was really directed towards the earth's centre, which he, in common with most Greek astronomers, supposed to be also the centre of the universe. Thus each kind of matter has its appropriate place, motion to which ends in rest, while motion away from it, being constrained, cannot last. Accordingly, the constant periodicity of terrestrial phenomena necessitates as constant a transformation of dry and wet, and of hot and cold bodies into one another. This is explained with perfect accuracy by the diurnal and annual revolutions of the sun. Here, however, we are introduced to a new kind of motion, which, instead of being rectilinear and finite, is circular and eternal. To account for it, Aristotle assumes a fifth element entirely different in character from the four terrestrial elements. Unlike them, it is absolutely simple, and has a correspondingly simple mode of motion, which, as our philosopher erroneously supposes, can be no other than circular rotation. The scholastic doctrine of the incorruptibility of the heavens was; for its original author not an *a priori* assumption, but a legitimate induction from experience, and one which alone made experience intelligible.

Out of this eternal unchanging divine substance, which he calls aether, are formed the heavenly bodies and the transparent spheres containing them. But there is something beyond it of an even higher and purer nature. Aristotle proves, with great subtlety, from his fundamental assumptions, that the movement of an extended substance cannot be self-caused. He also proves that motion must be absolutely continuous and without a beginning. We have, therefore, no choice but to accept the existence of an unextended, immaterial, eternal, and infinite Power on which the whole cosmos depends.

So much only is established in the *Physics*. Further particulars are given in the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*. There we learn that, all movement being from possibility to actuality, the source of movement must be a completely realised actuality—pure form without any admixture of matter. But the highest form known to us in the ascending scale of organic life is the human soul, and the highest function of soul is reason. Reason then must be that which moves without being moved itself, drawing all things upwards and onwards by the love which its perfection inspires. The eternal, infinite, absolute actuality existing beyond the outermost starry sphere is God. Aristotle describes God as the thought which thinks itself and finds in the simple act of self-consciousness an everlasting happiness, wonderful if it always equals the best moments of our mortal life, more wonderful still if it surpasses them. There is only one supreme God, for plurality is due to an admixture of matter, and He is pure form. The rule of many is not good, as Homer says. Let there be one Lord.

Such are the closing words of what was possibly Aristotle's last work, the clear confession of his monotheistic creed. A monotheistic creed, I have said, but one so unlike all other religions, that its nature has been continually misunderstood. While some have found in it a theology like that of the Jews or of Plato's *Timaeus* or of modern Europe, others have resolved it into a vague pantheism. Among the latter one is surprised to find Sir A. Grant, a writer to whom the Aristotelian texts must have been perfectly familiar both in spirit and in letter. Yet nothing can possibly be more clear and emphatic than the declarations they contain. Pantheism identifies God with the world; Aristotle separates them as pure form from form more or less alloyed with matter. Pantheism denies personality to God; Aristotle gives him unity, spirituality, self-consciousness, and happiness. If these qualities do not collectively involve personality, one would like to know what does. The accomplished editor of the *Nicomachean Ethics* might have remembered how great a place is given in that work to human self-consciousness, to waking active thought as distinguished from mere

slumbering faculties or unrealised possibilities of action. And what Aristotle regarded as essential to human perfection, he would regard as still more essential to divine perfection. Finally, the God of pantheism is a general idea ; the God of Aristotle is an individual. Sir A. Grant says that he (or it) is the idea of Good.¹ I doubt very much whether there is a single passage in the *Metaphysics* to sanction such an expression. Did it occur, however, that would be no warrant for approximating the Aristotelian to the Platonic theology, in presence of such a distinct declaration as that the First Mover is both conceptually and numerically one,² coming after repeated repudiations of the Platonic attempt to isolate ideas from the particulars in which they are immersed. Then Sir A. Grant goes on to speak of the desire felt by Nature for God as being itself God,³ and therefore involving a belief in pantheism. Such a notion is not generally called pantheism, but hylozoism, the attribution of life to matter. I have no desire, however, to quarrel about words. The philosopher who believes in the existence of a vague consciousness, a spiritual effort towards something higher diffused through nature, may, if you will, be called a pantheist, but not unless this be the only divinity he recognises. The term is altogether misleading when applied to one who also proclaims the existence of something in his opinion far higher, better and more real—a living God, who transcends nature, and is independent of her, although she is not independent of him.

We must also observe that the parallel drawn by Sir A. Grant between the theology of Aristotle and that of John Stuart Mill is singularly unfortunate. It is in the first place incorrect to say that Mill represented God as benevolent but not omnipotent. He only suggested the idea as less inconsistent with facts than other forms of theism.⁴ In the next place, Aristotle's God was almost exactly the reverse of this. He possesses infinite power, but no benevolence at all. He has nothing to do with the internal arrangements of the world, either as creator or as providence. He is, in fact, an egoist of the most transcendent kind, who does nothing but think about himself and his own perfections. Nothing could be more characteristic of the unpractical Aristotelian philosophy ; nothing more repugnant to the eager English reformer, the pupil of Bentham and of Plato. And, thirdly, Sir A. Grant takes what is not the God of Aristotle's system at all, but a mere abstraction, the immanent reason of Nature, the Form which can never

¹ Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 176.

² *Metaph.*, xii., 8, p. 1074, a, 36.

³ Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 176.

⁴ 'The rational attitude of a thinking mind towards the supernatural, whether in natural or revealed religion, is that of scepticism, as distinguished from belief on the one hand and atheism on the other.'—Mill's *Essays on Religion*, p. 242.

quite conquer Matter, and places it on the same line with a God who, however hypothetical, is nothing if not a person distinct from the world ; while, as if to bewilder the unfortunate 'English reader' still further, he adds, in the very next sentence, that 'the great defect in Aristotle's conception of God is' the denial 'that God can be a moral Being.'¹

The words last quoted, which in a Christian sense are true enough, lead us over to the contrasting view of Aristotle's theology, to the false theory of it held by the Schoolmen and their modern disciples. The Stagirite agrees with Catholic theism in accepting a personal God, and he agrees with the First Article of the English Church, though not with the Pentateuch, in saying that God is without parts or passions ; but there his agreement ceases. Excluding such a thing as divine interference with nature, his theology of course excludes the possibility of revelation, inspiration, miracles, and grace. Nor is this a mere omission ; it is a necessity of the system. If there can be no existence without time, no time without motion, no motion without unrealised desire, no desire without an ideal, no ideal but eternally self-thinking thought—then it logically follows that God, in the sense of such a thought, must not interest himself in the affairs of men. Again, Aristotelianism equally excludes the arguments by which modern theologians have sought to prove the existence of God. Here also the system is true to its contemporaneous, statical, superficial character. The First Mover is not separated from us by a chain of causes extending through past ages, but by an intervening breadth of space and the wheels within wheels of a cosmic machine. Aristotle had no difficulty in conceiving what some have since declared to be inconceivable, a series of antecedents without any beginning in time ; it was rather the beginning of such a series that he could not make intelligible to himself. Nor, as we have seen, did he think that the adaptation in living organisms of each part to every other required an external explanation. Far less did it occur to him that the production of impressions on our senses was due to the agency of a supernatural power. It is absolutely certain that he would have rejected the Cartesian argument, according to which a perfect being must exist if it be only conceivable—existence being necessarily involved in the idea of perfection.² Finally, not recognising such a faculty as conscience, he would not have admitted it to be the voice of God speaking in the soul.³

¹ Grant's *Aristotle*, p. 177.

² τὸ δ' εἶναι οὐκ οὐσία οὐδενί· οὐ γὰρ γένος τὸ ὄν.—*An. Post.*, ii., 7, p. 92.

³ The Catholic interpretation of Aristotle's First Philosophy has recently been reasserted by Prof. Franz Brentano (himself no longer a Catholic) in his learned and ingenious *Aristoteles* (Leipzig, 1911). The summary character of the present work leaves me no room for a detailed examination of Brentano's arguments ; and perhaps

On the other hand, Aristotle's own theistic arguments cannot stand for a moment in the face of modern science. We know by the law of inertia that it is not the continuance, but the arrest or the beginning of motion which requires to be accounted for. We know by the Copernican system that there is no solid sidereal sphere governing the revolutions of all nature. And we know by the Newtonian physics that gravitation is not dependent on fixed points in space for its operation. *The Philosophy of the Philosopher Aristotle*—as Prof. St. George Mivart once called it—is as inconsistent with the demonstrations of modern astronomy as it is with the faith of mediaeval Catholicism.

It remains to be seen whether the system which we are examining is consistent with itself. It is not. The Prime Mover, being unextended, cannot be located outside the sidereal sphere; nor can he be brought into immediate contact with that more than with any other part of the cosmos. If the aether has a motion proper to itself, then no spiritual agency is required to keep it in perpetual rotation. If the crystalline spheres fit accurately together, as they must, to avoid leaving a vacuum anywhere, there can be no friction, no production of heat, and consequently no effect produced on the sublunary sphere. Finally, no rotatory or other movement can, taken alone, have any conceivable connexion with the realisation of a possibility, in the sense of progress from a lower to a higher state of being. It is merely the perpetual exchange of one indifferent position for another.

We have now to consider what were the speculative motives that led Aristotle to overlook these contradictions, and to find rest in a theory even less satisfactory than the earlier systems which he is always attacking with relentless animosity. The first motive seems to have been the train of reasoning by which universal essences, the objects of knowledge, gradually came to be identified with particular objects, the sole existing realities. For the arguments against such an identification, as put forward by our philosopher himself, still remained unanswered. The individuals comprising a species were still too transient for certainty and too numerous for comprehension. But when for the antithesis between Form and Matter was substituted the antithesis between Actuality and Possibility, two modes of evasion presented themselves. The first was to distinguish between actual knowledge and potential knowledge. The former corresponded to existing particulars, the latter to general ideas.¹ This, however, besides breaking up the unity of knowledge, was inconsistent with the

it will be time enough to meet them when his conclusions have been accepted by any considerable number of Aristotelian experts.

¹ *Metaph.*, xiii., 10.

whole tenor of Aristotle's previous teaching. What can be more actual than demonstration, and how can there be any demonstration of transient particulars? The other mode of reconciliation was perhaps suggested by the need of an external cause to raise Possibility into Actuality. Such a cause might be conceived with all the advantages and without the drawbacks of a Platonic Idea. It would be at once the moving agent and the model of perfection; it could reconcile the general and the particular by the simple fact of being eternal in time, comprehensive in space, and unique in kind. Aristotle found such a cause, or rather a whole series of such causes, in the celestial spheres. In his system, these bear just the same relation to terrestrial phenomena that Plato's Ideas were conceived as bearing to the world of sense. They are, in fact, the Ideas made sensible and superficial, placed alongside of, instead of beneath or behind, the transient particulars which they irradiate and sustain.

The analogy may be carried even farther. If Plato regarded the things of sense as not merely a veil, but an imperfect imitation of the only true realities; so also did Aristotle represent the sublunary elements as copying the dispositions and activities of the ethereal spheres. They too have their concentric arrangements—first fire, then air, then water, and lastly earth in the centre; while their perpetual transformation into one another presents an image in time of the spatial rotation which those sublime beings perform. And although it is a mistake to identify Aristotle's Supreme Mind with the Idea of Good, there can be no doubt of its having been suggested by that Idea. It is, in fact, the translation of Plato's abstraction into concrete reality, and the completion of a process which Plato had himself begun. From another point of view we may say that both master and disciple were working, each in his own way, at the solution of a problem which entirely dominates Greek philosophy from Empedocles on—the reconciliation of Parmenides and Heracleitus, Being and Becoming, the eternal and the changeful, the one and the many. Aristotle adopts the superficial, external method of placing the two principles side by side in space; and for a long time the world accepted his solution for the same reason that had commended it to his own acceptance, its apparent agreement with popular tradition and with the facts of experience. It must be confessed, however, that here also he was following the lines laid down by Plato. The *Timæus* and the *Laws* are marked by a similar tendency to substitute astronomy for dialectics, to study the celestial movements with religious veneration, to rebuild on a scientific basis that ancient star-worship which, even among the Greeks, enjoyed a much higher authority and prestige than the

humanised mythology of the poets. But for Christianity this star-worship would probably have become the official faith of the Roman world. As it is, Dante's great poem presents us with a singular compromise between the two creeds. The crystalline spheres are retained, only they have become the abode of glorified spirits instead of being the embodiment of eternal gods. We often hear it said that the Copernican system was rejected as offensive to human pride, because it removed the earth from the centre of the universe. This is a profound mistake. Its offence was to degrade the heavenly bodies by assimilating them to the earth.¹ Among several planets, all revolving round the sun, there could not be any marked qualitative difference. In the theological sense there was no longer any heaven; and with the disappearance of the solid sidereal sphere there was no longer any necessity for a Prime Mover.

There is, perhaps, no passage in Aristotle's writings—there is certainly none in his scientific writings—more eloquent than that which describes the glory of his imaginary heavens. The following translation may give some faint idea of its solemnity and splendour:—

We believe, then, that the whole heaven is one and everlasting, without beginning or end through all eternity, but holding infinite time within its orb; not, as some say, created or capable of being destroyed. We believe it on account of the grounds already stated, and also on account of the consequences resulting from a different hypothesis. For, it must add great weight to our assurance of its immortality and everlasting duration that this opinion may be, while the contrary opinion cannot possibly be true. Wherefore, we may trust the traditions of old time, and especially of our own race, when they tell us that there is something deathless and divine about the things which, although moving, have a movement that is not bounded, but is itself the universal bound, a perfect circle enclosing in its revolutions the imperfect motions that are subject to restraint and arrest; while this, being without beginning or end or rest through infinite time, is the one from which all others originate, and into which they disappear. That heaven which antiquity assigned to the gods as an immortal abode, is shown by the present argument to be uncreated and indestructible, exempt alike from mortal weakness and from the weariness of subjection to a force acting in opposition to its natural inclination; for in proportion to its everlasting continuance such a compulsion would be laborious, and unparticipant in the highest perfection of design. We must not, then, believe with the old mythologists that an Atlas is needed to uphold it; for they, like some in more recent times, fancied that the heavens were made of

¹ 'Non pensar oltre lei [la terra] essere un corpo senza alma e vita et anche feccia tra le sustanze corporali.' Giordano Bruno, *Cena de le Ceneri*, p. 130 (*Opere*, ed. Wagner). 'Non dovete stimar . . . che il corpo terreno sia vile e più degli altri ignobile.'—*De l' Infinito Universo e Mondi*, p. 54 (*ib.*).

heavy earthy matter, and so fabled an animated necessity for their support; nor yet that, as Empedocles says, they will last only so long as their own proper momentum is exceeded by the whirling motion of which they partake.¹ Nor, again, is it likely that their everlasting revolution can be kept up by the exercise of a conscious will; for no soul could lead a happy and blessed existence that was engaged in such a task, necessitating, as it would, an unceasing struggle with their native tendency to move in a different direction, without even the mental relaxation and bodily rest which mortals gain by sleep, but doomed to the eternal torment of an Ixion's wheel. Our explanation, on the other hand, is, as we say, not only more consistent with the eternity of the heavens, but also can alone be reconciled with the acknowledged vaticinations of religious faith.²

It will be seen from the foregoing passage how strong a hold the old Greek notion of an encircling limit had on the mind of Aristotle, and how he transformed it back from the high intellectual significance given to it by Plato into its original sense of a mere space-enclosing figure. And it will also be seen how he credits his spheres with a full measure of that moving power which, according to his rather unfair criticism, the Platonic Ideas did not possess. His astronomy also supplied him with that series of graduated transitions between two extremes in which Greek thought so much delighted. The heavenly bodies mediate between God and the earth; partly active and partly passive, they both receive and communicate the moving creative impulse. The four terrestrial elements are moved in the various categories of substance, quantity, quality, and place; the aether moves in place only, God remains 'without variableness or shadow of a change.' Finally, by its absolute simplicity and purity, the aether mediates between the coarse matter perceived by our senses and the absolutely immaterial Nous, and is itself supposed to be pervaded by a similar gradation of fineness from top to bottom. Furthermore, the upper fire, which must not be confounded with flame, furnishes a connecting link between the aether and the other elements, being related to them as Form to Matter, or as agent to patient; and, when the elements are decomposed into their constituent qualities, hot and cold occupy a similar position with regard to wet and dry.

IV

In mastering Aristotle's cosmology, we have gained the key to his entire method of systematisation. Henceforth, the

¹ This conjecture of Empedocles deserves more attention than it has as yet received. It illustrates once more the superior insight of the early thinkers as compared with Aristotle.

² *De Caelo*, ii., 1.

Stagirite has no secrets for us. Where we were formerly content to show that he erred, we can now show why he erred; by generalising his principles of arrangement, we can exhibit them still more clearly in their conflict with modern thought. The method, then, pursued by Aristotle is to divide his subject into two more or less unequal masses, one of which is supposed to be governed by necessary principles, admitting of certain demonstration; while the other is irregular, and can only be studied according to the rules of probable evidence. The parts of the one are homogeneous and concentrically disposed, the movements of each being controlled by that immediately outside and above it. The parts of the other are heterogeneous and distributed among a number of antithetical pairs, between whose members there is, or ought to be, a general equilibrium preserved, the whole system having a common centre which either oscillates from one extreme to another, or holds the balance between them. The second system is enclosed within the first, and is altogether dependent on it for the impulses determining its processes of metamorphosis and equilibration. Where the internal adjustments of a system to itself or of one system to the other are not consciously made, Aristotle calls them nature. They are always adapted to secure its everlasting continuance either in an individual or in a specific form. Actuality belongs more particularly to the first sphere, and possibility to the second, but both are, to a certain extent, represented in each.

We have already seen how this fundamental division is applied to the universe as a whole. But our philosopher is not content with classifying the phenomena as he finds them; he attempts to demonstrate the necessity of their dual existence; and in so doing is guilty of something very like a vicious circle. For, after proving from the terrestrial movements that there must be an eternal movement to keep them going, he now assumes the revolving aether, and argues that there must be a motionless solid centre for it to revolve round, although a geometrical axis would have served the purpose equally well. By a still more palpable fallacy, he proceeds to show that a body whose tendency is towards the centre, must, in the nature of things, be opposed by another body whose tendency is towards the circumference. In order to fill up the interval created by this opposition, two intermediate bodies are required, and thus we get the four elements—earth, water, air, fire. These, again, are resolved into the antithetical couples, dry and wet, hot and cold, the possible combinations of which, by twos, give us the four elements once more. Earth is dry and cold, water cold and wet, air wet and hot, fire hot and dry; each adjacent pair having a quality in common, and each element being charac-

terised by the excess of a particular quality ; earth is especially dry, water cold, air wet, and fire hot. The common centre of each antithesis is what Aristotle calls the First Matter, the mere abstract unformed possibility of existence. This matter, to become actual and sensible, must combine two qualities, and has the power of oscillating from one quality to another, but it cannot, as a rule, simultaneously exchange both for their opposites. Earth may pass into water, exchanging dry for wet, but not so readily into air, for that transmutation would necessitate a double exchange at the same moment.

Those who will may see in all this an anticipation of chemical substitution and double decomposition. More absurd parallels have been discovered between ancient and modern ideas. It is possible, however, to trace a real connexion between the Aristotelian physics and mediaeval thought. I am not referring to the scholastic philosophy, for there never was the slightest doubt as to its derivation, but to the alchemy and astrology which did duty for positive science during so many centuries, and even overlapped it down to the time of Newton, himself an ardent alchemist. The superstitions of astrology originated independently of the peripatetic system, and probably long before it, but they were likely to be encouraged by it instead of being repressed, as they would have been by a less anthropomorphic philosophy. Aristotle himself limited the action of the heavens on the sublunary sphere to their heating power ; but, by crediting them with an immortal reason and the pursuit of ends unknown to us,¹ he opened a wide field for conjecture as to what those ends were, and how they could be ascertained. That the stars and planets were always thinking and acting, but never about our affairs, was not a notion likely to be permanently accepted. Neither was it easy to believe that their various configurations, movements, and names (the last probably revealed by themselves) were entirely without significance. From such considerations to the casting of horoscopes is not a far remove. The Aristotelian chemistry would still more readily lend itself to the purposes of alchemy. If nature is one vast process of transmutation, then particular bodies, such as the metals, not only may, but must be convertible into one another. And even those who rejected Aristotle's logic with scorn still clung to his natural philosophy when it flattered their hopes of gain. Bacon kept the theory of substantial forms. His originality consisted in looking for a method by which any form, or assemblage of forms might be superinduced at pleasure on the underlying matter. The real

¹ In the important Chapter xii. of his *De Caelo*, bk. ii., he represents the planets as possessed of life and activity, their manifold movements being presumably directed towards the attainment of their own happiness.

development of knowledge pursued a far different course. The great discoverers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries achieved their success by absolutely reversing the method of Aristotle, by bringing into fruitful contact principles which he had condemned to barren isolation. They carried terrestrial physics into the heavens; they brought down the absoluteness and eternity of celestial law to earth; they showed that Aristotle's antithetical qualities were merely quantitative distinctions. These they resolved into modes of motion; and they also resolved all motions into one, which was both rectilinear and perpetual. But they and their successors put an end to all dreams of transmutation, when they showed by another synthesis that all matter, at least within the limits of our experience, has the changeless consistency once attributed exclusively to the stellar spheres.¹

When Aristotle passes from the whole cosmos to the philosophy of life, his method of systematic division is less distinctly illustrated, but may still be traced. The fundamental separation is between body and soul. The latter has a wider meaning than what we associate with it at present. It covers not only the psychic functions but the whole life of the organism, which, again, is not what we mean by life. For life with us is both individual and collective; it resides in each speck of protoplasm, and also in the consensus of the whole organism. With Aristotle it is more exclusively a central principle, the final cause of the organism, the power which holds it together, and by which it was originally shaped. Biology begins by determining the idea of the whole, and then considers the means by which it is realised. The psychic functions are arranged according to a system of teleological subordination. The lower precedes the higher in time, but is logically necessitated by it. Thus nutrition, or the vegetative life in general, must be studied in close connexion with sensation and impulse, or animal life; and this, again, with thought or pure reasoning. On the other hand, anatomy and physiology are considered from a purely chemical and mechanical point of view. A vital purpose is, indeed, assigned to every organ, but with no more reference to its specifically vital properties than if it formed part of a steam engine. Here, as always with Aristotle, the idea of moderation determines the point of view whence the inferior or material system is to be studied. Organic tissue is made up of the four elemental principles—hot, cold, wet, and dry—mixed together in proper proportions; and the object of organic function is to maintain them in due equilibrium, an end

¹ The radio-chemistry of the twentieth century has reopened the question of how far the elements can be transmuted. But the object now is to acquire new sources of energy, not a more abundant supply of precious or other metals.

effected by the regulating power of the soul, which, accordingly, has its seat in the heart or centre of the body. It has been already shown how, in endeavouring to work out this chimerical theory, Aristotle went much further astray from the truth than sundry other Greek physiologists less biassed by the requirements of a symmetrical method.

After the formal and material elements of life have been separately discussed, there comes an account of the process by which they are first brought into connexion, for this is how Aristotle views generation. With him it is the information of matter by psychic force ; and his notions about the part which each parent plays in the production of a new being are vitiated throughout by this mistaken assumption. Nevertheless his treatise on the subject is, for its time, one of the most wonderful works ever written, and, as we are told on good authority,¹ is now less antiquated than the corresponding researches of Harvey. The philosopher's peculiar genius for observation, analysis, and comparison will partly account for his success ; but, if I mistake not, there is another and less obvious reason. Here the fatal separation of form and matter was, except at first starting, precluded by the very idea of generation ; and the teleological principle of spontaneous efforts to realise a predetermined end was, as it happened, perfectly in accordance with the facts themselves.

And now, looking back on his cosmology, we can see that Aristotle was never so near the truth as when he tried to bridge over the gulf between his two spheres, the one corruptible and the other eternal, by the idea of motion considered as a specific property of all matter, and persisting through all time ; as a link between the celestial revolutions and the changes occurring on or near the earth's surface ; and, finally, as a direct cause of heat, the great agent acting in opposition to gravity—which last view may have suggested Bacon's capital discovery, that heat is itself a mode of motion.

Another method by which Aristotle strove to overcome the antithesis between life as a mechanical arrangement and life as a metaphysical conception, was the newly created study of comparative anatomy. The variations in structure and function which accompany variations in the environment, though statically and not dynamically conceived, bring us very near to the truth that biological phenomena are subject to the same general laws of causation as all other phenomena ; and it is this truth which, in the science of life, corresponds to the identification of terrestrial with celestial physics in the science of general mechanics. Vitality is not an individualised principle stationed in the heart and serving only to balance opposite forces against

¹ Lewes, *Aristotle: a Chapter from the History of Science*, p. 326 (London, 1864).

one another ; but it is diffused through all the tissues, and bestows on them that extraordinary plasticity which responds to the actions of the environment by spontaneous variations capable of being summed up in any direction, and so creating entirely new organic forms without the intervention of any supernatural agency.

V

We have now to consider how Aristotle treats psychology, not in connexion with biology, but as a distinct science—a separation not quite consistent with his own definition of soul, but forced on him by the traditions of Greek philosophy and by the nature of things. Here the fundamental antithesis assumes a three-fold form. First the theoretical activity of mind is distinguished from its practical activity ; the one being exercised on things which cannot, the other on things which can, be changed. Again, a similar distinction prevails within the special province of each. Where truth is the object, knowledge stands opposed to sense ; where good is sought, reason rises superior to passion. The one antithesis had been introduced into philosophy by the early physicists, the other by Socrates. They were confounded in the psychology of Plato, and Aristotle had the merit of separating them once more. Yet even he preserves a certain artificial parallelism between them by using the common name *Nous*, or reason, to denote the controlling member in each. To make his anthropology still more complex, there is a third antithesis to be taken into account, that between the individual and the community, which also sometimes slides into a partial coincidence with the other two.

Aristotle's treatise on the soul is mainly devoted to a description of the theoretical faculties—sense, and thought or reason. By sense we become acquainted with the material qualities of things ; by thought with their forms or ideas. It has been already mentioned that, according to our philosopher, the organism is a system of contrary forces held in equilibrium by the soul, whose seat he supposes to be in the heart. We now learn that every sensation is a disturbance of this equilibrium. In other words, the sensorium being virtually any and every mode of matter, it is raised from possibility to actuality by the presence of some one force, such as heat or cold, in sufficient strength to incline the balance that way. Here we have, quite in Aristotle's usual style, a description instead of an explanation. The atomic notion of thin films thrown off from the object of sense, and falling on the organs of sight or touch, was but a crude guess ; still it has more affinity with the discoveries

of a Young or a Helmholtz than scholastic phrases about potentiality and actuality. That sensation implies a disturbance of equilibrium is, indeed, an important truth; only, the equilibrium must be conceived as a balance, not of possible sensations, but of molecular states; that is to say, it must be interpreted according to the atomic theory.

Aristotle is more successful when he proceeds to discuss the imagination. He explains it to be a continuance of the movement originally communicated by the felt object to the organ of sense, kept up in the absence of the object itself;—as near an approach to the truth as could be made in his time. And he is also right in saying that the operations of reason are only made possible by the help of what he calls phantasms—that is, faint reproductions of sensations. In addition to this, he points out the connexion between memory and imagination, and enumerates the laws of association briefly, but with great accuracy. He is, however, altogether unaware of their scope. So far from using them to explain mental processes other than memory, he does not even see that they account for involuntary reminiscence, and limits them to the voluntary operation by which we recall a missing name or other image to consciousness.

So far, Aristotle regards the soul as a function, or energy, or perfection of the body, from which it can no more be separated than vision from the eye. It is otherwise with the part of mind which he calls *Nous*, or Reason—the faculty which takes cognisance of abstract ideas or the pure forms of things. This corresponds, in the microcosm, to the eternal *Nous* of the macrocosm, and, like it, is absolutely immaterial, not depending for its activity on the exercise of any bodily organ. There is, however, a general analogy between sensation and thought considered as processes of cognition. Previous to experience, the *Nous* is no thought in particular, but merely a possibility of thinking, like a smooth wax tablet waiting to be written on. It is determined to some particular idea by contact with the objective forms of things, and in this determination it is raised from power to actuality. The law of moderation, however, does not apply to thought. Excessive stimulation is first injurious and then destructive to the organs of sense, but we cannot have too much of an idea; the more intense it is the better are we able to conceive all the ideas that come under it, just because ideation is an incorporeal process. And there seems to be this further distinction between sensation and thought, that the latter is much more completely identified with its object than the former; it is in the very act of imprinting themselves on the *Nous* that the forms of things become perfectly detached from matter, and so attain their final realisation. It is only in our consciousness that the eternal ideas of

transient phenomena become conscious of themselves. But here an unexpected difficulty intervenes. The object of thought, the Idea in the outward world, is not, for us, part of the eternal Reason until it is thought; nor is the faculty by which we conceive it as such realised as pure incorporeal reason until it meets and becomes identified with the external Idea. A mediating principle must supervene to unite the two potencies, and convert them by their union into the supreme actuality of thought.

Aristotle gives the solution in these words :

‘Since in the whole of nature to something which serves as matter for each kind . . . there corresponds something else which is the cause or agent because it makes them all, the two being related to one another as art to its material, of necessity these differences must be found also in the soul. And to the one intellect which answers to this description because it *becomes* all things corresponds the other which *makes* it all things, like a sort of definite quality (ἐξῆς τις), such as light. For in a manner light too converts colours which are potential into actual colours. And it is this intellect (νοῦς) which is separable and impassive and unmixed, being in its essential nature an activity. For that which acts is always superior to that which is acted upon, the cause or principle to the matter. Now actual knowledge is identical with the thing known; but potential knowledge is prior in time in the individual; and yet not universally prior in time. But this intellect has no intermittence in its thought. It is, however, when separated that it is its true self, and this, its essential nature, alone is immortal and eternal. But we do not remember because this is impassive, while the intellect which can be affected is perishable and without this [the active intellect] does not think at all.’¹

In his work on the *Generation of Animals* Aristotle tells us that human reason is not transmitted to offspring by the ordinary process of procreation, but enters the embryo from without, its physical basis being none of the terrestrial elements but a substance akin to that of which the stars are composed. This theory, however, serves only to differentiate human reason in general from the lower mental faculties shared by us with the other animals; it does not explain the difference between the passive or receptive intellect and that illuminating principle which his commentators afterwards called the νοῦς ποιητικός—the active or constructive reason. The question is, what does Aristotle mean by this higher reason? It has been suggested that it is a special illumination given by the divine to the human spirit. But this seems an improbable explanation in view of the deep chasm fixed between the Prime Mover and the rest of the universe. Besides, the phrase ἐξῆς τις seems to stamp it

¹ Arist. *De Animâ*, iii., 5; translated by Prof. Dawes Hicks, p. 135 of his edition.

as entirely subjective, whereas a divine revelation would be objective. It will have been observed that Prof. Hicks translates the words in question 'a sort of definite quality,' but I think the meaning is better expressed by 'ability'—which indeed is a latinised version of the Greek word, and like it may convey the notion of something artificially acquired. In the Aristotelian philosophy it stands between potency and realisation, but is nearer the latter than the former. In the present instance I take this acquired rational ability to mean nothing less than personal self-consciousness. If my interpretation be correct Aristotle holds that the exercise of a self-distinguishing consciousness is a necessary condition of all other ideation, and—in my opinion quite rightly—as an aptitude not present in the individual human being from the first beginning of conscious life, but acquired by intercourse with companions in whom reason has reached complete maturity, and shared—according to Aristotle—with other beings of a higher order, namely the star-spirits and the Prime Mover whose rational faculties never cease to energise. From Aristotle's point of view it is true to say that the active or constructive reason, so understood, is immortal and eternal. For the human race, the heavenly luminaries, and the Prime Mover have always existed and will always continue to exist without beginning or end; while the passive reason, that is the reason that receives its ideas as impressions from external objects, is indebted to the body for the sensations and memories through which it thinks, and therefore perishes with the body.

Assuming the truth of this interpretation—for which the present writer is alone responsible—Aristotle held that the presence of a self-distinguishing consciousness is necessary for the formation and connexion of general ideas. I believe that he was mistaken in so thinking, and that children are entitled to be called rational beings before they become conscious of their personality as such.¹ And, were that assumption to be granted, his solution would only amount to a restatement of the problem, leaving the origin of reason as much a mystery as before.

If there are any who value Aristotle as a champion of spiritualism, they must take him with his encumbrances. If his philosophy proves that one part of the soul is immaterial, it proves equally that the soul, as a total aggregate, is perishable. Not only does he reject Plato's metempsychosis as inconsistent with physiology, but he declares that affection, memory, and reasoning are functions not of the eternal Nous, but of the whole man, and come to an end with his dissolution. As to the active Nous, he tells us that it cannot think without the assistance of

¹ Jean Paul Richter was probably a precocious child, but the thought 'Ich bin ein Ich!' did not occur to him till the age of five.

the passive Nous, which is mortal. And there are various passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* showing that he had faced this negation of a future life, and was perfectly resigned to its consequences.¹ At one period of his life, probably when under the immediate influence of Plato, he had indulged in dreams of immortality; but a profounder acquaintance with natural science seems to have dissipated them. Perhaps a lingering veneration for his teacher made him purposely use ambiguous language in reference to the eternity of that constructive reason which he had so closely associated with self-consciousness. It may remind us of Spinoza's celebrated proposition, *Sentimus experimurque nos aeternos esse*, words absolutely disconnected with the hope of a continued existence of the individual after death, but apparently intended to enlist some of the sentiment associated with that belief on the side of the writer's own philosophy.

On the other hand, the spirit of Plato's religion survived in the teaching of his disciple under a new form. The idea of an eternal personality was, as it were, unified and made objective by being transferred from the human to the divine; and so each philosopher develops an aspect of religious faith which is wanting in the other, thereby illustrating the tendencies, to some extent mutually exclusive, which divide all theology between them. It remains to observe that if even Aristotle's theism is inconsistent with the Catholic faith, much more must his psychology be its direct negation. *The Philosophy of the Philosopher* is as fatal to the Church's doctrine of future rewards and punishments as it is to her doctrine of divine interference with the usual order of nature.

VI

We now pass to the consideration of Aristotle's most important achievement—his system of logic. And as, here also, much will be found to criticise, it is as well to begin by saying that, in my opinion, his contributions to the science are the most valuable ever made, and perhaps have done more to advance it than all other writings on the same subject put together.

The principal business of reason is, as we have seen, to form abstract ideas or concepts of things. But before the time of Aristotle it had already been discovered that concepts, or rather the terms expressing them, were capable of being united in propositions which might be either true or false, and whose truth might be a matter either of certainty or of simple opinion. Now, in modern psychology, down to comparatively recent times, it has always been assumed that, just as there is an

¹ See Zeller, pp. 602-606, where the whole subject is thoroughly discussed.

intellectual faculty or operation called abstraction corresponding to the terms of which a proposition is composed, so also there is a faculty or operation called judgment corresponding to the entire proposition. Sometimes, again, a third operation, which consists in linking propositions together to form syllogisms, is assigned to a distinct faculty called reason; sometimes all three are regarded as ascending steps in a single fundamental process. Neither Plato nor Aristotle, however, had thought out the subject so scientifically. To both the framing, or rather the discovery, of concepts was by far the most important business of a philosopher, judgment and reasoning being merely subsidiary to it. Hence, while in one part of their logic they were realists and conceptualists, in other parts they were nominalists. Abstract names and the definitions unfolding their connotation corresponded to actual entities in nature—the eternal Ideas of the one and the substantial forms of the other—as well as to mental representations about whose existence they were agreed, however they may have differed about their origin. But they did not in like manner treat propositions as the expression of natural laws without, or of judgments within, the mind; while reasoning they regarded much more as an art of thinking, a method for the discovery of ideas, than as the systematisation of a process spontaneously performed by every human being without knowing it; and, even as such, their tendency is to connect it with the theory of definition rather than with the theory of synthetic propositions. Some approach to a realistic view is, indeed, made by both. The restless and penetrating thought of Plato had, towards the close of his career, led him to enquire into the mutual relations of those Ideas which he had at first been inclined to regard as absolutely distinct. He shows us in the *Sophistes* how the most abstract notions, such as Being, Identity, and so forth, must, to a certain extent, partake of each other's nature; and when their relationship does not lie on the surface, he seeks to establish it by the interposition of a third idea obviously connected with both. In the later books of the *Republic* he also points to a scheme for arranging his Ideas according to a fixed hierarchy resembling the concatenation of mathematical proofs, by ascending and descending whose successive gradations the mind is to become familiarised with absolute truth; and we shall presently see how Aristotle, following in the same track, sought for a counterpart to his syllogistic method in the objective order of things. Nevertheless, with him, as with his master, science was not what it is with us, a study of laws, a perpetually growing body of truth, but a process of definition and classification, a systematisation of what had already been perceived and thought.

It was from the initiative of Socrates that logic received this

direction. By insisting on the supreme importance of definition, he drew away attention from the propositions which add to our knowledge, and concentrated it on those which only fix with precision the meaning of words. Yet, in so doing he was influenced quite as much by the spirit of the older physical philosophy, which he denounced, as by the necessities of the new humanistic culture, which he helped to introduce. His definitions were, in truth, the reproduction, on a very minute scale, of those attempts to formulate the whole universe which busied the earliest Ionian speculation. Following the natural tendency of Greek thought, and the powerful attraction of cosmic philosophy, an effort was speedily made to generalise and connect these partial definitions until they grew into a system of universal classification. It was when, under the influence of a new analysis, this system threatened to fall to pieces, that a rudimentary doctrine of judgment first made its appearance. The structure of a grammatical sentence was used to explain how objective ideas could, in a manner, overlap and adhere to one another. Hence propositions, which, as the expression of general truths, were destined to become the beginning and end of thought, remained at first strictly subordinated to the individual concepts that they linked and reconciled.

With Aristotle propositions assumed a new importance. He looked on them as mediating, not only between concepts, but also between conception and reasoning. Still, neither as a psychologist nor as a logician did he appreciate them at their real value. A very brief consideration is given to judgment in his work on the soul; and we are left in doubt whether it is a function of *Nous* alone or of *Nous* combined with some other faculty. Setting aside the treatise on *Interpretation*, which is probably spurious, and, at any rate, throws no new light on the subject, we may gather from his logical writings half a dozen different suggestions towards a classification of propositions, based partly on their form and partly on their import. In all we find an evident tendency to apply, here also, his grand fundamental distinction between the sphere of uniformity and the sphere of change and opposition. All propositions are either universal or particular; either positive or negative; either necessary or actual or contingent; either reciprocating or not reciprocating; either essential or accidental; either answering to the first question in the categories, or to one of the other nine.¹ But nowhere is any attempt made to combine and systematise these various points of view.

In the theory of reasoning the simple proposition is taken as a starting-point; but instead of deducing the syllogism from

¹ *Anal. Pr.*, i., 1, *sub in.*; 2, *sub in.*; *Top.*, i., 8, Bekker (in the Tauchnitz ed., 6).

the synthesis of two premises, Aristotle reaches the premises through the conclusion. He tells us, indeed, that reasoning is a way of discovering from what we know, something that we did not know before. With him, however, it is really a process not of discovery but of proof. He starts with the conclusion, analyses it into predicate and subject or major and minor, and then, by a further analysis, introduces a middle term connecting the two. Thus, we begin with the proposition, 'Caius is mortal,' and prove it by interpolating the notion humanity between its two extremes. From this point of view the premises are merely a temporary scaffolding for bringing the major and minor into connexion with the middle term; and this is also the reason why Aristotle recognises three syllogistic figures only, instead of the four admitted by later logicians. For, the middle may either be contained in one extreme and contain the other, which gives us the first figure; or it may contain both, which gives the second figure; or be contained in both, which gives the third; and this is an exhaustive enumeration of the possible combinations.¹

If *A* is predicated of all *B*, and *B* is predicated of all *C*, then *A* is predicated of all *C*. All mammals are warm-blooded; all whales are mammals; therefore all whales are warm-blooded. If *A* is denied of all *B*, and *B* is predicated of all *C*, then *A* is denied of all *C*. No mammals are fishes; all whales are mammals; therefore no whales are fishes. In both examples the middle term is 'mammals.' Observe that it is interpolated between the subject and the predicate of the conclusion for the purpose of definitely linking those terms together, or definitely disjoining them. Observe also that in the examples given the middle term is the subject of the first, or major premise, and the predicate of the second, or minor premise. But, as Aristotle points out, there are perfectly valid syllogisms in which a different arrangement is followed. For instance, if all *A* is *B* and no *C* is *B*, it necessarily follows that no *A* is *C*. All whales are mammals; no fishes are mammals; therefore no whales are fishes. Here the middle term is the predicate in both premises. Or again, if all *B* is *A* and all *B* is *C*; some *A*'s must be *C*'s. All whales are mammals; all whales are aquatic animals; therefore some mammals are aquatic animals. Here the middle term is the subject in both premises. These forms of reasoning are called the second and third syllogistic figures; and Aristotle shows that from them nothing but negative or partial conclusions can be drawn. If we want universal affirmatives we must go to the first figure; and this, in his opinion, is the only satisfactory kind of syllogism—so much so, indeed, that he gives us a number of rules for converting the other figures into it. My

¹ *Anal. Pr.*, i., 23, p. 41, a, 11 (in the Tauchnitz ed., 22, 8).

purpose in going into these tedious details is to show that even here Aristotle has been guided by his fundamental point of view. The first figure follows the concentric arrangement of the celestial spheres. The second and third figures are not merely defective, inasmuch as they yield no conclusions at once general and positive, but they also remove the middle term from the central position that it rightfully occupies in the first figure. To bring them into conformity with that figure is the great task of the formal logician; and he accomplishes it by an elaborate system of what is called 'conversion,' making subject and predicate change places in a manner that reminds us of the transformations suffered by the sublunary elements.

The rules which Aristotle gives us for the conversion of propositions are no doubt highly instructive, and throw great light on their meaning; but one cannot help observing that such a process as conversion ought, on his own principles, to have been inadmissible. With Plato, as Aristotle understood him, the copulation of subject and predicate corresponded to an almost mechanical juxtaposition of two self-existent ideas. It was, therefore, a matter of indifference in what order they were placed. Aristotle, on the other hand, after insisting on the restoration of the concrete object, and reducing general notions to an analysis of its particular aspects, could not but make the predicate subordinate to, and dependent on, the subject—a relation which altogether excludes the logical possibility of making them interchangeable with one another.¹

The antithetical structure of the whole system is reproduced even in the first syllogistic figure, where there is a similar opposition between the first mood, by which alone universal affirmatives can be obtained, and the remaining three, whose conclusions are either negative or particular, or both. And the complicated rules for testing the validity of those syllogisms in which the premises are distinguished as necessary, actual, and possible, are still more obviously based on Aristotle's false metaphysical distinctions; so that with the overthrow of those distinctions large portions of the *Analytics* lose their entire value for modern students.

On the other hand, a theory of reasoning based on the relations of concepts, instead of on the relations of judgments, necessarily leaves out of account the whole doctrine of hypothetical and disjunctive propositions, together with that of the syllogisms based on them; since the elements of which they are composed are themselves propositions. And this inevitable omission is the more remarkable because disjunctive and, to a less extent, hypothetical arguments form the staple of Aristotle's own dialectic; while categorical reasoning never occurs in it at

¹ This point is well brought out in F. A. Lange's *Logische Untersuchungen*.

all. His constant method is to enumerate all possible views of a subject, and examine them, one after the other, rejecting those which are untenable, and resting content with the remainder. In other words, he reaches his positive conclusions through a series of negative premises representing a process of gradual elimination. The *First Analytics* is itself an admirable instance of his favourite method. Every possible combination of terms is discussed, and the valid moods are sifted out from a much greater number of illegitimate syllogisms. The dialectic of Socrates and Plato followed the same procedure. It was essentially experimental—a method of trial, elimination, and selection. On going back still further, we find that when there is any reasoning at all in Homer, it is conducted after the same fashion. Hector, in his soliloquy before the Scaean Gate, imagines three alternative courses, together exhausting the possibilities of the situation. He may either retreat within the walls, or offer terms of peace to Achilles, or fight. The first two alternatives being rejected, nothing remains but the third. This is the most elaborate example; but on many other occasions Homer's actors are represented as hesitating between two courses, and finally deciding on one of them.

Disjunction is, in truth, the primordial form of all reasoning, out of which the other forms are successively evolved; and, as such, it is common to man with the lower animals. You are taking a walk in the country with your dog. You come to a stream and jump over it. On measuring the distance with his eye, the animal is afraid to follow you. After waiting a little, he first runs up-stream in search of a crossing, and, finding none, returns to look for one in the opposite direction. Failing there also, he comes back once more, and either ventures on the leap or makes his way home by some other route. Now, on considering the matter a little more closely, we shall find that hypothetical reasoning takes its rise from the examination of each separate alternative presented by a disjunctive premise. A plurality of courses being open to us, we consider what will ensue on the acceptance or rejection of each. The dog in our illustration thinks (after a canine fashion) that if he jumps he may fall in; if he does not, he will be left behind. Hector will not take refuge within the walls, because, if he does, Polydamas will triumph over him; nor will he offer terms of peace, because, if he does, Achilles will refuse them. Once more, categorical reasoning is developed out of hypothetical reasoning by the necessity of deducing consequences from a general rule. Hector must have argued from the known characters of Polydamas and Achilles, that in certain circumstances they would act after a certain manner. I may add, that this progress of conscious reasoning is a reproduction of the unconscious logic

according to which life itself is evolved. All sorts of combinations are spontaneously produced, which, in consequence of the struggle for existence, cannot all survive. Those adapted to the conditions of life are selected, on trial, at the expense of the rest; and their adaptation or non-adaptation is determined in accordance with categorical laws. Furthermore, the framing of a disjunctive proposition necessitates the systematic distribution of possibilities under mutually exclusive heads, thus involving the logical processes of definition, division, and classification. Dialectic, as Plato understood it, consisted almost entirely in the joint performance of these operations;—a process which Aristotle regards as the immediate but very imperfect precursor of his own syllogistic method.¹ You cannot, he says, prove anything by dividing, for instance, all living things into the two classes, mortal and immortal; unless, indeed, you assume the very point under discussion—to which class a particular species belongs. Yet this is how he constantly reasons himself; and even demonstrative reasoning, as he interprets it, implies the possession of a ready-made classification. For, according to him, it consists exclusively of propositions which predicate some essential attribute of a thing—in other words, some attribute already included in the definition of the subject; and a continuous series of such definitions can only be given by a fixed classification of things.

VII

I have endeavoured to show that Aristotle's account of the syllogism is redundant on the one side and defective on the other, both errors being due to a false analysis of the reasoning process itself, combined with a false metaphysical philosophy. The same evil influences tell with much greater effect on his theory of applied reasoning. Here the fundamental division, corresponding to that between heaven and earth in the cosmos, is between demonstration and dialectic or experimental reasoning. The one starts with first principles of unquestionable validity, the other with principles the validity of which is to be tested by their consequences. Stated in its most abstract form, the distinction is sound, and very nearly prefigures the modern division between deduction and induction, the process by which general laws are applied, and the process by which they are established. Aristotle, however, committed two great mistakes; he thought that each method corresponded to an entirely different order of phenomena: and he thought that both were concerned for the most part with definitions. The *Posterior Analytics*, which contains his theory of demonstration, answers

¹ *Anal. Pr.*, i., 31; *Anal. Post.*, ii., 5.

to the astronomical portion of his physics ; it is, the doctrine of eternal and necessary truth. And just as his ontology distinguishes between the Prime Mover himself unmoved and the eternal movement produced by his influence, so also his logic distinguishes between infallible first principles and the truths derived from them, the latter being, in his opinion, of inferior value. Now, according to Aristotle, these first principles are definitions, and it is to this fact that their self-evident certainty is due. At the same time they are not verbal but real definitions—that is to say, they are the universal form of things in themselves as made manifest to the eye of reason, or rather, stamped upon it like the impression of a signet-ring on wax. And, by a further refinement, he seems to distinguish between the concept as a whole and the separate marks which make it up, these last being the ultimate elements of all existence, and as much beyond its complex forms as *Nous* is beyond reasoned truth.

Such a view was essentially unfavourable to the progress of science, assigning, as it did, a higher dignity to meagre and very questionable abstractions than to the far-reaching combinations by which alone we are enabled to unravel the inmost texture of visible phenomena. Instead of using reason to supplement sense, Aristotle turned it into a more subtle and universal kind of sense ; and if this disastrous assimilation was to a certain extent imposed upon him by the traditions of Athenian thought, it harmonised admirably with the descriptive and superficial character of his own intelligence. Much was also due to the method of geometry, which in his time had already assumed the form made familiar to us by Euclid's *Elements*. The employment of axioms side by side with definitions, might, indeed, have drawn his attention to the existence and importance of judgments which, in Kantian terminology, are not analytic but synthetic—that is, which add to the content of a notion instead of simply analysing it. But although he mentions axioms, and states that mathematical theorems are deduced from them, no suspicion of their essential difference from definitions, or of the typical significance which they were destined to assume in the theory of reasoning, seems ever to have crossed his mind ; otherwise he could hardly have failed to ask how we come by our knowledge of them, and to what they correspond in nature. On the whole, it seems likely that he looked on them as an analysis of our ideas, differing only from definition proper by the generality of its application ; for he names the law of contradiction as the most important of all axioms, and that from which the others proceed ;¹ next to it he places the law of excluded middle, which is also analytical ;

¹ *Metaph.*, iv., 3, *sub in.*

and his only other example is, that if equals be taken from equals the remainders are equal, a judgment the synthetic character of which is by no means clear, and has occasionally been disputed.¹

I cannot, then, agree with those critics who attribute to Aristotle a recognition of such things as 'laws of nature,' in the sense of uniform co-existences and sequences.² Such an idea implies a certain balance and equality between subject and predicate which he would never have admitted. It would, in his own language, be making relation, instead of substance, the leading category. It must be remembered also that he did not acknowledge the existence of those constant conjunctions in nature which we call laws. He did not admit that all matter was heavy, or that fluidity implied the presence of heat. The possession of constant properties, or rather of a single constant property—circular rotation—is reserved for the aether. Nor is this a common property of different and indefinitely multipliable phenomena; it characterises a single body, measurable in extent and unique in kind. Moreover, we have something better than indirect evidence on this point; we have the plain statement of Aristotle himself, that all science depends on first principles, about which it is impossible to be mistaken, precisely because they are universal abstractions not presented to the mind by any combination,³—a view quite inconsistent with the priority now given to general laws.

Answering to the first principles of demonstration in logic, if not absolutely identical with them, are what Aristotle calls causes in the nature of things. We have seen what an important part the middle term plays in Aristotle's theory of the syllogism. It is the vital principle of demonstration, the connecting link by which the two extreme terms are attached to one another. In the theory of applied logic, whose object is to bring the order of thought into complete parallelism with the order of things, the middle term through which a fact is demonstrated answers to the cause through which it exists. According to our notions,

¹ *Anal. Post.*, i., 10.

² 'Die Wissenschaft soll die Erscheinungen aus ihren Gründen erklären, welche näher in den allgemeinen Ursachen und Gesetzen zu suchen sind' (Zeller, p. 203). 'Induction is the method of proceeding from particular instances to general laws' (Wallace, p. 13). 'It seems to have been his [Aristotle's] idea that after gathering facts up to a certain point, a flash of intuition would supervene, telling us "This is a law"' (Grant, p. 68). *Apropos* of the discussion whence this last passage is extracted, I may observe that Sir A. Grant is quite mistaken in saying that Aristotle 'omits to provide for verification.' Aristotle is, on the contrary, most anxious to show that his theories agree with all the known facts. See in particular his memorable declaration (*De Gen. An.*, iii., 10, p. 760, b, 27), that facts are more to be trusted than reasonings.

The emphasis laid by Aristotle on concepts as distinguished from laws is noticed by J. H. v. Kirchmann, in his German translation of the *Metaphysics*, p. 13.

³ *De An.*, iii., 6, *sub in.*, taken together with *Anal. Post.*, i., 6.

only two terms, antecedent and consequent, are involved in the idea of causation; and causation only becomes a matter for reasoning when we perceive that the sequence is repeated in a uniform manner. But Aristotle was very far from having reached, or even suspected, this point of view. A cause is with him not a determining antecedent, but a secret nexus by which the co-existence of two phenomena is explained. Instead of preceding it intercedes; and this is why he finds its subjective counterpart in the middle term of the syllogism. Some of his own examples will make the matter clearer. Why is the moon eclipsed? Because the earth intervenes between her and the sun. Why is the bright side of the moon always turned towards the sun? Because she shines by his reflected light (here light is the middle term). Why is that person talking to the rich man? Because he wants to borrow money of him. Why are those two men friends? Because they have the same enemy.¹

Aristotle even goes so far as to eliminate the notion of sequence from causation altogether. He tells us that the causes of events are contemporary with the events themselves; those of past events being past; of present events, present; and of future events, future. 'This thing will not be because that other thing has happened, for the middle term must be homogeneous with the extremes.'² It is obvious that such a limitation abolishes the power of scientific prediction, which, if not the only test of knowledge, is at any rate its most valuable verification. The Stagirite has been charged with trusting too much to deductive reasoning; it now appears that, on the contrary, he had no conception of its most important function. Here, as everywhere, he follows not the synthetic method of the mathematician, but the analytic method of the naturalist. Finally, instead of combining the notions of cause and kind, he systematically confuses them. It will be remembered how his excellent division of causes into material, formal, efficient, and final, was rendered nugatory by the continued influence of Plato's ideas. The formal cause always tended to absorb the other three; and it is by their complete assimilation that he attempts to harmonise the order of demonstration with the order of existence. For the formal cause of a phenomenon simply meant those properties which it shared with others of the same kind, and it was by virtue of those properties that it became a subject for general reasoning, which was interpreted as a methodical arrangement of concepts one within another, answering to the concentric disposition of the cosmic spheres.

Owing to the slight importance which Aristotle attaches to judgments as compared with concepts, he does not go very deeply into the question, how do we obtain our premises? He

¹ *Anal. Post.*, i., 34; ii., 2.

² *Ibid.*, ii., 12, p. 95, a, 36.

says, in remarkably emphatic language, that all knowledge is acquired either by demonstration or by induction ; or rather, we may add, in the last resort by the latter only, since demonstration rests on generals which are discovered inductively ; but his generals mean definitions and abstract predicates or subjects, rather than synthetic propositions. If, however, his attention had been called to the distinction, we cannot suppose that he would, on his own principles, have adopted conclusions essentially different from those of the modern experiential school.

We are here confronted with an important and much disputed question, Was Aristotle an empiricist ? I see no possible answer but that he was, if empiricist means what alone it should mean—one who believes that the mind neither anticipates anything in the content, nor contributes anything to the form of experience ; in other words, who believes knowledge to be the agreement of thought with things imposed by things on thought. That this was Aristotle's position seems so clearly established by the language of the last chapter of his *Posterior Analytics*, which is *primâ facie* so much in favour of this view that the burden of proof rests on those who give it another interpretation. Among these, the most important with whom I am acquainted is Zeller.¹ The eminent German historian, after asserting in former editions of his work that Aristotle derived his first principles from the self-contemplation of the *Nous*, has now, probably in deference to the unanswerable arguments of Kampe, abandoned this position. He still, however, assumes the existence of a rather indefinable *a priori* element in the Aristotelian noology, on the strength of the following considerations:—In the first place, according to Aristotle, even sense-perception is not a purely passive process, and therefore intellectual cognition can still less be so. But the passages quoted only amount to this, that the passivity of a thing which is raised from possibility to actuality differs from the passivity implied in the destruction of its proper nature ; and that the objects of abstract thought come from within, not from without, in the sense that they are presented by the imagination to the reason. The pure empiricist need not deny either position. He would freely admit that to lose one's reason through drunkenness or disease is a quite different sort of operation from being impressed with a new truth ; and he would also admit that we generalise not directly from outward experience, but from that highly-abridged and representative experience which memory supplies. Neither process, however, constitutes an anticipation of outward experience or an addition to it. It is from the materialist, not from the empiricist, that Aristotle differs. He believes that the forms under which

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 190 *sqq.*

matter appears are separable from every particular portion of matter, though not from all matter, in the external world; and he believes that a complete separation between them is effected in the single instance of self-conscious reason, which again, in cognising any particular thing is identified with that thing *minus* its matter. Zeller's next argument is that the cognition of ideas by the *Nous* is immediate, whereas the process of generalisation from experience described by Aristotle is extremely indirect. Here Zeller seems to misunderstand the word *ἀμεσος*. Aristotle never applies it to knowledge, but only to the objective relations of ideas with one another. Two terms constitute an 'immediate' premise when they are not connected by another term, quite irrespective of the steps by which we come to recognise their conjunction. So with the terms themselves. They are 'immediate' when they cannot be derived from any ulterior principle; when, in short, they are simple and uncaused. Finally, the objection that first principles, being the most certain and necessary of all, cannot be derived from sensible experience, which, dealing only with material objects, must inherit the uncertainty and contingency of matter,—is an objection, not to the empiricist interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, but to empiricism itself; and it is not allowable to explain away the plain words of an ancient writer in order to reconcile them with assumptions which he nowhere admits. That universality and necessity involve an *a priori* cognition or an intellectual intuition, is a modern theory unsupported by a single sentence in Aristotle.¹ I quite agree with Zeller when he goes on to say that in Aristotle's psychology 'certain thoughts and notions arise through the action of the object thought about on the thinking mind, just as perception arises through the action of the perceived object on the percipient' (p. 195); but how this differs from the purest empiricism is more than I am able to understand.

It is remarkable that Aristotle, after repeatedly speaking of induction as an ascent from particulars to generals, when he comes to trace the process by which we arrive at the most general notions of all, does not admit the possibility of such a movement in one direction only. The universal and the individual are, according to him, combined in our most elementary sense-impressions, and the business of scientific experience is to separate them. Starting from a middle point, we work up to indivisible predicates on the one hand and down to indivisible subjects on the other, the final apprehension of both extremes being the office, not of science, but of *Nous*. This theory is equally true and acute. The perception of individual

¹ It is a mistake to translate *νόησις*, as the Germans do, by *Anschaung*. The *Nous* does not intuit ideas, but is converted into and consists of them.

facts is just as difficult and just as slowly acquired as the conception of ultimate abstractions. Moreover, the two processes are carried on *pari passu*, each being only made possible by and through the other. No true notion can be framed without a firm grasp of the particulars from which it is abstracted ; no individual object can be studied without analysing it into a group of common predicates, the idiosyncrasy of which—that is, their special combination—differentiates it from every other object. What, however, I wish to remark is the illustration incidentally afforded by this striking aperçu of Aristotle's analytical method, which is also the essentially Greek method of thought. We saw that, for our philosopher, syllogism was not the subsumption of a particular case under a general law, but the interpolation of a mean between two extremes ; we now see that his induction is not the finding of a law for the particular phenomenon, but its analysis into two elements—one universal and the other individual—a solution of the mean into the extremes. And the distinctive originality of his whole system was to fix two such extremes for the universe—a self-thinking thought in absolute self-identity at one end of the scale, and an absolutely indeterminate matter at the other ; by combining which in various proportions he then re-constructed the whole intermediate phenomenal reality. In studying each particular class of facts, he follows the same method. The genus is marked by some characteristic attribute which one species—the prerogative species, so to speak—exhibits in its greatest purity, while the others form a graduated scale by variously combining this attribute with its opposite or privation. Hence his theory, since revived by Goethe, that the colours are so many different mixtures of light and darkness.

It has, until lately, been customary to speak as if all that Aristotle knew about induction was contained in a few scattered passages where it is mentioned under that name in the *Analytics*. This, no doubt, is true, if by induction we mean simple generalisation. But if we understand by it the philosophy of experimental evidence—the analysis of those means by which, in the absence of direct observation, we decide between two conflicting hypotheses—then the *Topics* must be pronounced as good a discussion on the subject as was compatible with his general theory of knowledge. For he supposes that there are large classes of phenomena, including, among other things, the whole range of human life, which, not being bound by any fixed order, lie outside the scope of scientific demonstration, although capable of being determined with various degrees of probability ; and here also what he has in view is not the discovery of laws, but the construction of definitions. These being a matter of opinion, could always be attacked as well as maintained. Thus

the constant conflict and balancing of opposite forces, which we have learned to associate with the sublunary sphere, has its logical representative no less than the kindred ideas of uncertainty and vicissitude. And, in connexion with this side of applied logic, Aristotle has also to consider the requirements of those who took part in the public debates on disputed questions, then very common among educated Athenians, and frequently turning on verbal definitions. But while we find many varieties of reasoning suggested, such as Reasoning by Analogy, Disjunctive Reasoning, Hypothetical Reasoning (though without a generalised expression for all its varieties), and, what is most remarkable, three out of Mill's four Experimental Methods,¹ we do not find that any interesting or useful application is made of them. And even considered as a handbook for debaters, the *Topics* is not successful. With the practical incompetence of a mere naturalist, Aristotle has supplied heads for arguments in such profusion and such utter carelessness of their relative importance that no memory could sustain the burden, except in the probably rare instances when a lifetime was devoted to their study.

VIII

We have now concluded our survey of the first great mental antithesis, that between reason on the one hand, and sense and opinion on the other. The next antithesis, that between reason and passion, will occupy us a much shorter time. With it we pass from theory to practice, from metaphysics and logic to moral philosophy. But, as we saw in the preceding chapter, Aristotle is not a practical genius; for him the supreme interest of life is still the acquisition of knowledge. Theorising activity corresponds to the celestial world, in which there can be neither opposition nor excess; while passion corresponds to the sublunary sphere, where order is only preserved by the balancing of antithetical forces; while the moderating influence of reason corresponds to the control exercised by the higher over the lower system.

The passions themselves, and the means by which they can be either excited or controlled, are described in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* with wonderful knowledge of human nature in the abstract, but with almost no reference to the art for whose purposes the information is ostensibly systematised; while in the *Ethics* they are studied, so to speak, statically, in their

¹ For Analogy, see *Top.*, ii., 10, *sub in.*; Disjunction, ii., 6, *sub in.*; Hypothetical Reasoning, ii., 10, p. 115, a, 15; Method of Differences, ii., 11, *sub in.*, Method of Residues, vi., 11, *sub in.*; Concomitant Variations, ii., 10, p. 114, b, 37; v., 8, *sub in.*; vi., 7, *sub in.* The Method of Agreement occurs *An. Prior.*, ii., 27, *sub fin.*; and *An. Post.*, ii., 13, p. 97, b, 7.

condition of permanent equilibration or disequilibration; the virtues and vices being represented as so many different aspects of those conditions. It is obvious that such an extremely artificial parallelism could not be carried out without a considerable strain and distortion of the facts involved. The only virtue that can, with truth, be described as a form of moderation is temperance; and even in temperance this is accidental rather than essential. Elsewhere Aristotle deduces the extremes from the mean rather than the mean from the extremes; and sometimes one of the extremes is invented for the occasion. To fit justice, confessedly the most important virtue, into such a scheme was obviously impracticable without reinterpreting the idea of moderation. Instead of an equilibrium between opposing impulses in the same person, we have equality in the treatment of different persons; which again resolves itself into giving them their own, without any definite determination of what their own may be.¹ It cannot even be said that Aristotle represented either the best ethical thought of his own age, or an indispensable stage in the evolution of all thought. The extreme insufficiency of his ethical theory is due to the fancied necessity of squaring it with the requirements of his cosmological system. For no sooner does he place himself at the popular point of view than he deduces the particular virtues from regard to the welfare of others, treating them all as so many different forms of justice or of disinterestedness, those which are most useful to the community ranking as the highest.² But nowhere do we find that love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity which burns so brightly in the *Odyssey* and in Pindar and Herodotus, in Socrates and Plato, or in the public orations of his own contemporary, Demosthenes.

Aristotle has sometimes been represented as an advocate of free-will against necessity. But the question had not really been opened in his time. He rejected fatalism; but it had not occurred to him that internal motives might exercise a constraining power over action. Nor has his freedom anything to do with the self-assertion of mind, its extrication from the chain of physical antecedents. It is simply the element of arbitrariness and uncertainty supposed to characterise the region of change and opposition, as distinguished from the higher region of undeviating regularity.

It is only in this higher region that perfect virtue can be realised. The maintenance of a settled balance between rival solicitations, or between the excess and defect of those impulses

¹ It may possibly be urged that the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is of doubtful authenticity. Still the dilemma remains that Aristotle either omitted the most important of all moral questions from his ethics, or that he treated it in a miserably inadequate manner.

² *Eth. Nic.*, v., 1; *Rhet.*, i., 6, p. 1362, b, 28; 9, p. 1366, b, 4.

which lead us to seek pleasure and avoid pain, is good indeed, but neither the only nor the chief good. The law of moderation does not extend to that supremely happy life which is related to our emotional existence as the aether to the terrestrial elements, as soul to body, as reason to sense, as science to opinion. Here it is the steady subordination of means to ends which imitates the insphering of the heavenly orbs, the hierarchy of psychic faculties, and the chain of syllogistic arguments. Of theoretic activity we cannot have too much, and all other activities, whether public or private, should be regarded as so much machinery for ensuring its peaceful prosecution. Wisdom and temperance had been absolutely identified by Socrates; they are as absolutely held apart by Aristotle. And what we have had occasion to observe in the other departments of thought is verified here once more. The method of analysis and opposition, apparently so prudent, proved, in the end, unfruitful. Notwithstanding his paradoxes, Socrates was substantially right. The moral regeneration of the world was destined to be brought about, not by Dorian discipline, but by free Athenian thought, working on practical conceptions—by the discovery of new moral truth, or rather by the dialectic development of old truth. And, conversely, the highest development of theoretic activity was not attained by isolating it in egoistic self-contemplation from the world of human needs, but by consecrating it to their service, informing it with their vitality, and subjecting it, in common with them, to that law of moderation from which no energy, however godlike, is exempt.

The final antithesis of conscious life is that between the individual and the state. In this sense, Aristotle's *Politics* is the completion of his *Ethics*. It is only in a well-ordered community that moral habits can be acquired; and it is only in such a community that the best or intellectual life can be attained, although, properly speaking, it is not a social life. Nevertheless, the *Politics*, like every other portion of Aristotle's system, reproduces within itself the elements of an independent whole. To understand its internal organisation, we must begin by disregarding Aristotle's abortive classification (chiefly adapted from Plato) of constitutions into three legitimate—Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Republic; and three illegitimate—Democracy, Oligarchy, and Tyranny. Aristotle distinguishes them by saying that the legitimate forms are governed with a view to the general good; the illegitimate with a view to the interests of particular classes or persons. But, in point of fact, as Zeller shows,¹ he cannot keep up this distinction; and we shall better understand his true idea by substituting for it another—that between the intellectual and the material state. The object of

¹ P. 753.

the one is to secure the highest culture for a ruling caste, who are to abstain from industrial occupations, and to be supported by the labour of a dependent population. Such a government may be either monarchical or aristocratic; but it must necessarily be in the hands of a few. The object of the other—the material state—is to maintain a stable equilibrium between the opposing interests of rich and poor—two classes practically distinguished as the few and the many. This end is best attained where supreme power belongs to the middle class. The deviations are represented by oligarchy and tyranny on the one side, and by extreme democracy on the other. Where such constitutions exist, the best mode of preserving them is to moderate their characteristic excess by borrowing certain institutions from the opposite form of government, or by modifying their own institutions in a conciliatory sense.

In the last chapter the theories of art, and especially of tragic poetry, propounded in Aristotle's *Poetics*, were dealt with at length. For the sake of formal completeness, it may be mentioned here that those theories are adapted to the general scheme of his systematic philosophy. The plot or plan of a work answers to the formal or rational element in nature, and this is why Aristotle so immensely over-estimates its importance. And, just as in his moral philosophy, the ethical element, represented by character-drawing, is strictly subordinated to it. The centre of equilibrium is, however, not supplied by virtue, but by exact imitation of nature, so that the characters must not deviate very far from mediocrity in the direction either of heroism or of wickedness.

IX

Notwithstanding the radical error of Aristotle's philosophy—the false abstraction and isolation of the intellectual from the material sphere in nature and in human life—it may furnish a useful corrective to the much falser philosophy insinuated, if not inculcated, by some English moralists of the last century. Taken altogether, the teaching of these writers seems to be that the industry which addresses itself to the satisfaction of our material wants is much more meritorious than the artistic work which gives us direct aesthetic enjoyment, or the literary work which stimulates and gratifies our intellectual cravings; while within the artistic sphere fidelity of portraiture is preferred to the creation of ideal beauty; and within the intellectual sphere, mere observation of facts is set above the theorising power by which facts are unified and explained. Some of the school alluded to were great enemies of materialism; but teaching

like theirs is materialism of the worst description. Consistently carried out, it would first reduce Europe to the level of China, and then reduce the whole human race to the level of bees or beavers. They forgot that when we were all comfortably clothed, housed, and fed, our true lives would have only just begun. The choice would then remain between some new refinement of animal appetite and the theorising activity which, according to Aristotle, is the absolute end, every other activity being only a means for its attainment. There is not, indeed, such a fundamental distinction as he supposed, for activities of every order are connected by a continual reciprocity of services; but this only amounts to saying that the highest knowledge is a means to every other end no less than an end in itself. Aristotle is also fully justified in urging the necessity of leisure as a condition of intellectual progress. We may add that it is a leisure which is amply earned, for without it industrial production could not be maintained at its present height. Nor should the same standard of perfection be imposed on spiritual as on material labour. The latter could not be carried on at all unless success, and not failure, were the rule. It is otherwise in the ideal sphere. There the proportions are necessarily reversed. We must be content if out of a thousand guesses and trials one should contribute something to the immortal heritage of truth. Yet we may hope that this will not always be so, that the great discoveries and creations wrought out through the waste of innumerable lives are not only the expiation of all error and suffering in the past, but are also the pledge of a future when such sacrifices shall no longer be required.

The two elements of error and achievement are so intimately blended and mutually conditioned in the philosophy which we have been reviewing, that to decide on their respective importance is impossible without first deciding on a still larger question—the value of systematic thought as such, and apart from its actual content. For Aristotle was perhaps the greatest master of systematisation that ever lived. The framework and language of science are still, to a great extent, what he made them; and it remains to be seen whether they will ever be completely remodelled. Yet even this gift has not been an unmixed benefit, for it was long used in the service of false doctrines, and it still induces critics to read into the Aristotelian forms truths which they do not really contain. Let us conclude by observing that of all the ancients, or even of all thinkers before the eighteenth century, there is none to whom the methods and results of modern science could so easily be explained. While finding that they reversed his own most cherished convictions on every point, he would still be prepared by his logical studies

to appreciate the evidence on which they rest, and by his ardent love of truth to accept them without reserve. Most of all would he welcome our astronomy and our biology with wonder and delight, while viewing the development of modern machinery with much more qualified admiration, and the progress of democracy perhaps with suspicious fear. He who thought that the mind and body of an artisan were alike debased by the exercise of some simple handicraft under the pure bright sky of Greece, what would he have said to the effect wrought on human beings by the noisome, grinding, sunless, soulless drudgery of our factories and mines! How profoundly unfitted would he have deemed its victims to influence those political issues with which the interests of science are every day becoming more vitally connected! Yet slowly, perhaps, and unwillingly, he might be brought to perceive that our industry has been the indispensable basis of our knowledge, as supplying both the material means and the moral ends of its cultivation. He might also learn that there is an even closer relationship between the two: that while the supporters of privilege are leagued for the maintenance of superstition, the workers, and those who advocate their claim to equality of opportunity are leagued for its restraint and overthrow. And if he still shrank back from the heat and smoke and turmoil amid which the genius of our age stands, like another Heracleitus, in feverish excitement, by the steam-furnace whence its powers of revolutionary transmutation are derived, we too might reapply the words of the old Ephesian prophet, bidding him enter boldly, for here also there are gods.

CHAPTER X

THE STOICS

I

THE systems of Plato and Aristotle were splendid digressions from the main line of ancient speculation rather than stages in its regular development. The philosophers who came after them went back to an earlier tradition, and the influence of the two greatest Hellenic masters, when it was felt at all, was felt almost entirely as a disturbing or deflecting force. The extraordinary reach of their principles could not, in truth, be appreciated until the organised experience of mankind had accumulated to an extent requiring the application of new rules for its comprehension and utilisation ; and to make such an accumulation possible, nothing less was needed than the combined efforts of the whole western world. Such religious, educational, social, and political reforms as those contemplated in Plato's *Republic*, though originally designed for a single city-community, could not be realised, even approximately, within a narrower field than that offered by the mediaeval church and the feudal state. The ideal theory first gained practical significance in connexion with the metaphysics of Christian theology. The place given by Plato to mathematics has only been fully justified by the development of modern science. So also, Aristotle's criticism became of practical importance only when the dreams against which it was directed had embodied themselves in a fabric of oppressive superstition. Only the vast extension of reasoned knowledge has enabled us to disentangle the vitally important elements of Aristotle's logic from the mass of useless refinements in which they are imbedded ; his fourfold division of causes could not be estimated rightly even by Bacon, Descartes, or Spinoza ; while his arrangement of the sciences, his remarks on classification, and his contributions to comparative biology bring us up to the very verge of theories whose first promulgation is still within the memories of living men.

Again, the spiritualism taught by Plato and Aristotle alike—by the disciple, indeed, with even more distinctness than by the master—was so entirely inconsistent with the common belief of antiquity as to remain a dead letter for nearly six

centuries—that is, until the time of Plotinus. The difference between body and mind was recognised by every school, but only as the difference between solid and gaseous matter is recognised by us; while the antithesis between conscious and unconscious existence, with all its momentous consequences, was recognised by none. The old hypothesis had to be thoroughly thought out before its insufficiency could be completely and irrevocably confessed.

Nor was this the only reason why the spiritualists lost touch with their age. If in some respects they were far in advance of early Greek thought, in other respects they were far behind it. Their systems were pervaded by an unphilosophical dualism which tended to undo much that had been achieved by their less prejudiced predecessors. For this we have partly to blame their environment. The opposition of God and the world, heaven and earth, mind and matter, necessity in nature and free-will in man, was a concession—though of course an unconscious concession—to the stupid bigotry of Athens. Yet at the same time they had failed to solve those psychological problems which had most interest for an Athenian public. Instead of following up the attempt made by the Sophists and Socrates to place morality on a scientific foundation, they busied themselves with the construction of a new machinery for diminishing the efficacy of temptation or for strengthening the efficacy of law. To the question, What is the highest good? Plato gave an answer which nobody could understand, and Aristotle an answer which was almost absolutely useless to anybody but himself. The other great problem, What is the ultimate foundation of knowledge? was left in an equally unsatisfactory state. Plato never answered it at all; Aristotle merely pointed out the negative conditions that its solution must fulfil.

It is not, then, surprising that the Academic and Peripatetic schools utterly failed to carry on the great movement inaugurated by their respective founders. The successors of Plato first lost themselves in a labyrinth of Pythagorean mysticism, and then sank into the position of mere moral instructors. The history of that remarkable revolution by which the Academy regained a foremost place in Greek thought, will form the subject of a future chapter: here we may anticipate so far as to observe that it was effected by taking up and presenting in its original purity a tradition of older date than Platonism, though presented under a new aspect and mixed with other elements by Plato. The heirs of Aristotle, after staggering on a few paces under the immense burden of his encyclopaedic bequest, came to a dead halt, and contented themselves with keeping the treasure safe until the time should arrive for its appropriation and reinvestment by a stronger speculative race.

No sooner did the two imperial systems lose their ascendancy than the germs which they had temporarily over-shadowed sprang up into vigorous vitality, and for more than five centuries dominated the whole course not only of Greek but of European thought. Of these by far the most important was the naturalistic idea, the belief that physical science might be substituted for religious superstitions and local conventions as an impregnable basis of conduct. In a former chapter I endeavoured to show that, while there are traces of this idea in the philosophy of Heracleitus, and while its roots stretch far back into the literature and popular faith of Greece, it was formulated for the first time by the two great Sophists, Prodicus and Hippias, who, in the momentous division between Nature and Law, placed themselves—Hippias more particularly—on the side of Nature. Two causes led to the temporary discredit of their teaching. One was the perversion by which natural right became the watchword of those who, like Plato's Callicles, held that nothing should stand between the strong man and the gratification of his desire for pleasure or for power. The other was the keen criticism of the Humanists, the friends of social convention, who held with Protagoras that nature was unknowable, or with Gorgias that she did not exist, or with Socrates that her laws were the secret of the gods. It was in particular the overwhelming personal influence of Socrates which triumphed. He drew away from the Sophists their strongest disciple, Antisthenes, and convinced him that philosophy was valuable only in so far as it became a life-renovating power, and that, viewed in this light, it had no relation to anything outside ourselves. But just as Socrates had discarded the physical speculations of former teachers, so also did Antisthenes discard the dialectic which Socrates had substituted for them, even to the extent of denying that definition was possible.¹ Yet he seems to have kept a firm hold on the two great ideas that were the net result of all previous philosophy, the idea of a cosmos, the common citizenship of which made all men potentially equal,² and the idea of reason as the essential prerogative of man.³

Antisthenes pushed to its extreme consequences a movement begun by the naturalistic Sophists. His doctrine was what would now be called anarchic collectivism. The State, marriage, private property, and the then accepted forms of religion were to be abolished, and all mankind were to herd promiscuously together.⁴ Either he or his followers, alone among the ancients, declared that slavery was wrong; and, like Socrates, he held that the virtue of men and women was the same.⁵ But what he meant by this broad human virtue,

¹ Aristotle, *Metaph.*, viii., 3, 1043, b, 25.

² Laert. Diog., vi., 5. ³ *Ibid.*, vi., 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vi., 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

which according to him was identical with happiness, is not clear. We only know that he dissociated it in the strongest manner from pleasure. 'I had rather be mad than delighted,' is one of his characteristic sayings.¹ It would appear, however, that what he really objected to was self-indulgence—the pursuit of sensual gratification for its own sake—and that he was ready to welcome the enjoyments naturally accompanying the healthy discharge of vital function.²

Antisthenes and his school, of which Diogenes is the most popular and characteristic type, were afterwards known as Cynics; but the name is never mentioned by Plato and Aristotle, nor do they allude to the scurrility and systematic indecency afterwards associated with it. The anecdotes relating to this unsavoury subject should be received with extreme suspicion. There has always been a tendency to believe that philosophers carry out in practice what are vulgarly believed to be the logical consequences of their theories. Thus it is related of Pyrrho the Sceptic that when out walking he never turned aside to avoid any obstacle or danger, and was only saved from destruction by the vigilance of his friends.³ This is of course a silly fable; and we have Aristotle's word for it that the Sceptics took as good care of their lives as other people.⁴ In like manner we may conjecture that the Cynics, advocating as they did a return to nature and defiance of prejudice, were falsely credited with what was falsely supposed to be the practical exemplification of their precepts. It is at any rate remarkable that Epictetus, a man not disposed to undervalue the obligations of decorum, constantly refers to Diogenes as a kind of philosophical saint, and that he describes the ideal Cynic in words which would apply without alteration to the character of a Christian apostle.⁵

Cynicism, if we understand it rightly, was only the mutilated form of an older philosophy having for its object to set morality free from convention, and to found it anew on a scientific knowledge of natural law. The need of such a system was not felt so long as Plato and Aristotle were unfolding their wonderful schemes for a reorganisation of action and belief. With the temporary collapse of those schemes it came once more to the front. The result was its expansion into a new school which so thoroughly satisfied the demands of the age, that for five centuries the noblest spirits of Greece and Rome, with few exceptions, adhered to its doctrines; that in dying it bequeathed some of their most vital elements to the metaphysics and the

¹ *Ibid.*, vi., 3.

² Athenaeus, *Deipnosoph.*, xii., p. 513, a; Stobaeus, *Florilegium*, 29, 65.

³ Laert. *Diog.*, ix., 11.

⁴ *Metaph.*, iv., 4, 1008, b, 12 *sqq.*

⁵ *Diss.*, iii., 22.

theology by which it was succeeded ; that with their decay it reappeared as an important factor in modern thought ; and that its name has become imperishably associated in our own language with the proud endurance of suffering, the self-sufficingness of conscious rectitude, and the renunciation of all external support, except what may be derived from contemplation of the immortal dead, whose heroism is recorded in history, or of the eternal cosmic forces performing their glorious offices with unimpassioned energy and imperturbable repose.

II

One day, some few years after the death of Aristotle, a short, lean, swarthy young man, of weak build, with clumsily shaped limbs, and head inclined to one side, was standing in an Athenian bookshop, intently studying a roll of manuscript. His name was Zeno, and he was a native of Citium, a Greek colony in Cyprus, where the Hellenic element had become adulterated with a considerable Phoenician infusion. According to some accounts, Zeno had come to the great centre of intellectual activity to study, according to others for the sale of Tyrian purple. At any rate the volume which he held in his hand decided his vocation. It was the second book of Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates*. Zeno eagerly asked where such men as he whose sayings stood recorded there were to be found. At that moment the Cynic Crates happened to pass by. 'There is one of them,' said the bookseller, 'follow him.'¹

The history of this Crates was distinguished by the one solitary romance of Greek philosophy. A young lady of noble family, named Hipparchia, fell desperately in love with him, refused several most eligible suitors, and threatened to kill herself unless she was given to him in marriage. Her parents in despair sent for Crates. Marriage, for a philosopher, was against the principles of his sect, and he at first joined them in endeavouring to dissuade her. Finding his remonstrances unavailing, he at last flung at her feet the staff and wallet which constituted his whole worldly possessions, exclaiming, 'Here is the bridegroom, and that is the dower. Think of this matter well, for you cannot be my partner unless you follow the same calling with me.' Hipparchia consented, and thenceforth, heedless of taunts, conformed her life in every respect to the Cynic pattern.²

Zeno had more delicacy or less fortitude than Hipparchia ; and the very meagre intellectual fare provided by Crates must

¹ Laert. D., vii., 1 *sqq.*

² *Ibid.*, vi., 7.

have left his inquisitive mind unsatisfied. Accordingly we find him leaving this rather disappointing substitute for Socrates, to study philosophy under Stilpo the Megarian dialectician and Polemo the head of the Academy;¹ while we know that he must have gone back to Heracleitus for the physical basis from which contemporary speculation had by this time cut itself completely free. At length, about the beginning of the third century B.C., Zeno, after having been a learner for twenty years, opened a school on his own account. As if to mark the practical bearing of his doctrine he chose one of the most frequented resorts in the city for its promulgation. There was at Athens a portico called the Poecile Stoa, adorned with frescoes by Polygnôtus, the greatest painter of the Cimonian period. It was among the monuments of that wonderful city, at once what the Loggia dei Lanzi is to Florence, and what Raphael's Stanze are to Rome; while, like the Place de la Concorde in Paris, it was darkened by the terrible associations of a revolutionary epoch. A century before Zeno's time fourteen hundred Athenian citizens had been slaughtered under its colonnades by order of the Thirty. 'I will purify the Stoa,' said the Cypriote stranger;² and the feelings still associated with the word Stoicism prove how nobly his promise was fulfilled.

How much of the complete system known in later times under this name was due to Zeno himself, we do not know; for nothing but a few fragments of his and of his immediate successor's writings is left. The idea of combining Antisthenes with Heracleitus, and both with Socrates, probably belongs to the founder of the school. His successor, Cleanthes, a man of character rather than of intellect, was content to hand on the doctrines of Zeno with some unimportant additions.³ But no Greek Stoic seems to have embraced the religious teachings of the school with equal enthusiasm. The highest extant utterance of Hellenic piety is preserved for us in his famous Hymn to Zeus. It must be added that Cleanthes was not free from the obstructive and intolerant bigotry so often associated with religious zeal. When Aristarchus of Samos, by an unexampled effort of genius, put forward the heliocentric theory of the solar system, eighteen centuries before Copernicus, the Stoic master declared that every Greek ought to join in prosecuting the rash astronomer for the sacrilegious crime of disturbing the altar-hearth of the universe.⁴ And this is the more surprising because Cleanthes himself had assigned the highest place to the sun among the administrative powers of nature. Cleanthes

¹ *Ibid.*, vii., 3.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ It seems to me that Professor W. L. Davidson exaggerates the theoretical services of Cleanthes to Stoicism (*The Stoic Creed*, p. 27).

⁴ Plutarch, *De facie in orbe lunae*, p. 923, a.

was a Greek of the Troad ; but after him came another Cypriote, Chrysippus, of whom we are told that without him the Stoa would not have existed ;¹ so thoroughly did he work out the system in all its details, and so strongly did he fortify its positions against hostile criticism by a framework of elaborate dialectic. 'Give me the propositions, and I will find the proofs!' he used to say to Cleanthes.² After him, nothing of importance was added to the doctrines of the school ; although the spirit by which they were animated seems to have undergone profound modifications in the lapse of ages.

In reality, Stoicism was not, like the older Greek philosophies, a creation of individual genius. It bears the character of a compilation both on its first exposition and on its final completion. Polemo, who had been a fine gentleman before he became a philosopher, taunted Zeno with filching his opinions from every quarter, like the cunning little Phoenician trader that he was.³ And it was said that the seven hundred treatises of Chrysippus would be reduced to a blank if everything that he had borrowed from others were to be erased. He seems, indeed, to have been the father of review-writers, and to have used the reviewer's right of transcription with more than modern license. Nearly a whole tragedy of Euripides reappeared in one of his 'articles,' and a wit on being asked what he was reading, replied, the '*Medea* of Chrysippus.'⁴

In this respect Stoicism betrays its descent from the encyclopaedic lectures of the earlier Sophists, particularly Hippias. While professedly subordinating every other study to the art of virtuous living, its expositors seem to have either put a very wide interpretation on virtue, or else to have raised its foundation to a most unnecessary height. They protested against Aristotle's glorification of knowledge as the supreme end, and declared its exclusive pursuit to be merely a more refined form of self-indulgence ;⁵ but, being Greeks, they shared the speculative passion with him, and seized on any pretext that enabled them to gratify it. And this inquisitiveness was apparently much stronger in Asiatic Hellas, whence the Stoics were almost entirely recruited, than in the old country, where centuries of intellectual activity had issued in a scepticism from which their fresher minds revolted.⁶ It is mentioned by Zeller as a proof of exhaustion and comparative indifference to such enquiries, that the Stoics should have fallen back on the Heracleitean philosophy for their physics.⁷ But all the ideas

¹ Laert. D. vii., 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, i.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ Plutarch, *De Stoic. Repug.*, ii., 6.

⁶ It is significant that the only Stoic who fell back on pure Cynicism should have been Aristo of Chios (Laert. D., vii., 2), a genuine Greek, while the only one who, like Aristotle, identified good with knowledge was Herillus, a Carthaginian (*ibid.*, 3).

⁷ *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, p. 18, cp. p. 362.

respecting the constitution of nature that were then possible had already been put forward. The Greek capacity for discovery was perhaps greater in the third century than at any former time; but from the very progress of science it was necessarily confined to specialists, such as Aristarchus of Samos or Archimedes. And if the Stoics made no original contributions to physical science, they at least accepted what seemed at that time to be its established results; here, as in other respects, offering a marked contrast to the Epicurean school. If a Cleanthes assailed the heliocentric hypothesis of Aristarchus on religious grounds, he was treading in the footsteps of Aristotle. It is far more important that his school should have taught the true theory of the earth's shape, of the moon's phases, of eclipses, and of the relative size and distance of the heavenly bodies.¹ On this last subject, indeed, one of the later Stoics, Posidonius, arrived at or accepted conclusions which, although falling far short of the reality, approximated to it in a very remarkable manner, when we consider what imperfect means of measurement the Greek astronomers had at their disposition.²

In returning to one of the older cosmologies, the Stoics placed themselves in opposition to the system of Aristotle as a whole, although on questions of detail they frequently adopted his conclusions. The object of the Heracleiteans, as against the Pythagoreans, had been to dissolve away every antithesis in a pervading unity of contradictories; and, as against the Eleatics, to substitute an eternal series of transformations for the changeless unity of absolute existence. The Stoics now applied the same method on a scale proportionate to the subsequent development of thought. Aristotle had carefully distinguished God from the world, even to the extent of isolating him from all share in its creation and interest in its affairs. The Stoics declared that God and the world were one. So far, it is allowable to call them pantheists. Yet their pantheism was very different from what we are accustomed to denote by that name; from the system of Spinoza, for example. Their strong faith in final causes and in Providence—a faith in which they closely followed Socrates—would be hardly consistent with anything but the ascription of a distinct and individual consciousness to the Supreme Being, which is just what modern pantheists refuse to admit. Their God was sometimes described as the soul of the world, the fiery element surrounding and

¹ Laert. D., vii., 1.

² Posidonius estimated the sun's distance from the earth at 500,000,000 stades, and the moon's distance at 2,000,000 stades, which, counting the stade at 200 yards, gives about 57,000,000 and 227,000 miles respectively. The sun's diameter he reckoned, according to one account, at 440,000 miles, about half the real amount; according to another account at a quarter less. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 190, Note 2.

penetrating every other kind of matter. What remained was the body of God ; but it was a body which he had originally created out of his own substance, and would, in the fulness of time, absorb into that substance again.¹ Thus they kept the future conflagration foretold by Heracleitus, but gave it a more religious colouring. The process of creation was then to begin over again, and all things were to run the same course as before down to the minutest particulars, human history repeating itself, and the same persons returning to live the same lives once more.² Such a belief evidently involved the most rigid fatalism : and here again their doctrine offers a pointed contrast to that of Aristotle. The Stagirite, differing, as it would seem, in this respect from all the older physicists, maintained that there was an element of chance and spontaneity in the sublunary sphere ; and without going very deeply into the mechanism of motives or the theory of moral responsibility, he had claimed a similar indeterminateness for the human will. Stoicism would hear of neither ; with it, as with modern science, the chain of causation is unbroken from first to last, and extends to all phenomena alike. The old theological notion of an omnipotent divine will, or of a destiny superior even to that will, was at once confirmed and continued by the new theory of natural law ; just as the predestination of the Reformers reappeared in the metaphysical rationalism of Spinoza.³

This dogma of universal determinism was combined in the Stoical system with an equally outspoken materialism. The capacity for either acting or being acted on was, according to Plato, the one convincing evidence of real existence ; and he had endeavoured to prove that there is such a thing as mind apart from matter by its possession of this characteristic mark.⁴ The Stoics simply reversed his argument. Whatever acts or is acted on, they⁵ said, must be corporeal ; therefore the soul is a kind of body.⁵ Here they only followed the common opinion of all philosophers who believed in an external world, except Plato and Aristotle, while to a certain extent anticipating the scientific automatism first taught in modern times by Spinoza, and simultaneously revived by various thinkers in the last century. To a certain extent only ; for they did not recognise the independent reality of a consciousness in which the

¹ For the authorities, see Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 139, Note 1.

² Zeller, p. 155. Nietzsche's 'eternal return' is plagiarised from the Stoics.

³ The Stoic necessarianism gave occasion to a repartee which has remained classical ever since, although its original authorship is known to few. A slave of Zeno's, on receiving chastisement for a theft, tried to excuse himself by quoting his master's principle that he was fated to steal. 'And to be flogged for it,' replied the philosopher, calmly continuing his predestined task. (Laert. D., vii., 1, 23.)

⁴ *Soph.*, 247, D.

⁵ Plutarch, *De Comm. Notit.*, xxx., 2 ; Cicero, *De Fato*, x. ; Laert. D., vii., 1, 149 ; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

mechanical processes are either reflected, or represented under a different aspect. And they further gave their theory a somewhat grotesque expression by interpreting those qualities and attributes of things, which other materialists have been content to consider as belonging to matter, as themselves actual bodies. For instance, the virtues and vices were, according to them, so many gaseous currents by which the soul is penetrated and shaped—a materialistic rendering of Plato's theory that qualities are distinct and independent substances.¹

As an additional point of contrast between the Stoics and the subsequent schools which they most resembled, it must be mentioned that while these look on the soul as inseparable from the body, and sharing its fortunes from first to last, although perfectly distinct from it in idea, they emphasised the antithesis between the two just as strongly as Plato, giving the soul an absolutely infinite power of self-assertion—including the power of choosing its beliefs—during our mortal life, and allowing it a continued, though not an immortal, existence after death.²

What has been said of the human soul applies equally to God, who is the soul of the world. He also is conceived under the form of a material but very subtle and all-penetrating element to which our souls are much more closely akin than to the coarse clay with which they are temporarily associated. And it was natural that the heavenly bodies, in whose composition the ethereal element seemed so visibly to predominate, should pass with the Stoics, as with Plato and Aristotle, for conscious beings inferior only in sacredness and majesty to the Supreme Ruler of all.³ Thus, the philosophy which we are studying helps to prove the strength and endurance of the religious reaction to which Socrates first gave an argumentative expression, and by which he was ultimately hurried to his doom. We may even trace its increasing ascendancy through the successive stages of the naturalistic school. Prodicus simply identified the gods of polytheism with unconscious physical forces ;⁴ Antisthenes, while discarding local worship, believed, like Rousseau, in the existence of a single deity ;⁵ Zeno, or his successors, revived the whole pantheon, but associated it with a pure morality, and explained away its more offensive features by an elaborate system of allegorical interpretation.⁶

It was not, however, by its legendary beliefs that the living power of ancient religion was displayed, but by the study and practice of divination. This was to the Greeks and Romans

¹ Plutarch, *De Stoic. Repug.*, xliii., 4.

² Zeller, p. 201 *sqq.*

³ Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.*, ii., 15, 39.

⁴ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.*, ix., 18.

⁵ Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.*, i., 13, 32.

⁶ Zeller, p. 321 *sqq.*

what priestly direction is to a Catholic, or the interpretation of Scripture texts to a Protestant believer. And the Stoics, in their anxiety to uphold religion as a bulwark of morality, went entirely along with the popular superstition; while at the same time they endeavoured to reconcile it with the universality of natural law by the same clumsily rationalistic methods that have found favour with some modern scientific defenders of the miraculous. The signs by which we are enabled to predict an event entered, they said, equally with the event itself, into the order of nature, being either connected with it by direct causation, as is the configuration of the heavenly bodies at a man's birth with his after fortunes, or determined from the beginning of the world to precede it according to an invariable rule, as with the indications derived from inspecting the entrails of sacrificial victims. And when sceptics asked of what use was the premonitory sign when everything was predestined, they replied that our behaviour in view of the warning was predestined as well.¹

To us the religion of the Stoics is interesting chiefly as a part of the machinery by which they attempted to make good the connexion between natural and moral law, assumed rather than proved by their Sophistic and Cynic precursors. But before proceeding to this branch of the subject we must glance at their mode of conceiving another side of the fundamental relationship between man and the universe. This is logic in its widest sense, so understood as to include the theory of the process by which we get our knowledge and of the ultimate evidence on which it rests, no less than the theory of formal ratiocination.

III

In their theory of cognition the Stoics chiefly followed Aristotle; only with them the doctrine of empiricism is enunciated so distinctly as to be placed beyond the reach of misinterpretation. The mind is at first a *tabula rasa*, and all our ideas are derived exclusively from the senses.² But while knowledge as a whole rests on sense, the validity of each particular sense-perception must be determined by an appeal to reason, in other words, to the totality of our acquired experience.³ So also the first principles of reasoning are not to be postulated, with Aristotle, as immediately and unconditionally certain; they are to be assumed as hypothetically

¹ See Cicero, *De Divinatione*, i., 54.

² Plutarch, *De Placit. Phil.*, iv., 11.

³ This seems the best explanation of the various statements on the subject made by our authorities, for which see Zeller, pp. 71-86.

true and gradually tested by the consequences deducible from them.¹ Both principles well illustrate the synthetic method of the Stoics—their habit of bringing into close connexion whatever Aristotle had studiously held apart. And it must be held, in opposition to the German critics, that their method marks a real advance on his. It ought at any rate to find more favour with the experiential school of modern science, with those who hold that the highest mathematical and physical laws are proved, not by the impossibility of conceiving their contradictions, but by their close agreement with all the facts accessible to our observation.

It was a consequence of the principle just stated that in formal logic the Stoics should give precedence to the hypothetical over the categorical syllogism.² From one point of view their preference for this mode of stating an argument was an advance on the method of Aristotle, whose reasonings, if explicitly set out, would have assumed the form of disjunctive syllogisms. From another point of view it was a return to the older dialectics of Socrates and Plato, who always looked on their major premises as possessing only a conditional validity—conditional, that is to say, on the consent of their interlocutor. We have further to note that both the disjunctive and the hypothetical syllogism were first recognised as such by the Stoics; a discovery connected with the feature which most profoundly distinguishes their logic from Aristotle's logic. I showed, in dealing with the latter, that it is based on an analysis of the concept, and that all its imperfections are due to that single circumstance. It was the Stoics who first brought judgment, so fatally neglected by the author of the *Analytics*, into proper prominence. Having once grasped propositions as the beginning and end of reasoning, they naturally and under the guidance of common language, passed from simple to complex assertions, and thus immediately detected the arguments to which these latter serve as a foundation. And if we proceed to ask why they were more interested in judgment than in conception, the explanation seems to be that their philosophy had its root in the ethical and practical interests which involve a continual process of injunction and belief, that is to say, a continual association of such disparate notions as an impression and an action; while the Aristotelian philosophy, being ultimately derived from early Greek thought, had for its leading principle the circumscription of external objects and their representation under the form of a classified series. Thus the naturalistic system, starting with the application of scientific ideas to human life, ultimately carried back into science the vital idea of Law; that is, of fixed relations subsisting between

¹ Sextus Emp., *Adv. Math.*, viii., 375.

² Zeller, p. 109.

disparate phenomena. And this in turn led to the reinterpretation of knowledge as the subsumption of less general under more general relations.

Under the guidance of a somewhat similar principle the Stoic logicians attempted a reform of Aristotle's categories. These they reduced to four: Substance, Quality, Disposition, and Relation (τὸ ὑποκείμενον, τὸ ποιὸν, τὸ πῶς ἔχον, and τὸ πρὸς τι πῶς ἔχον¹); and the change was an improvement in so far as it introduced a certain method and subordination where none existed before; for each category implies, and is contained in, its predecessor; whereas the only order traceable in Aristotle's categories refers to the comparative frequency of the questions to which they correspond.

With the idea of subsumption and subordination to law, we pass at once to the Stoic ethics. For Zeno, the end of life was self-consistency; for Cleanthes, consistency with nature; for Chrysippus, both the one and the other.² The still surviving individualism of the Cynics is represented in the first of these principles; the religious inspiration of the Stoa in the second; and the comprehensiveness of its great systematising intellect in the last. On the other hand, there is a vagueness about the idea of self-consistency which seems to date from a time when Stoicism was less a new and exclusive school than an endeavour to appropriate whatever was best in the older schools. For to be consistent is the common ideal of all philosophy, and is just what distinguishes it from the uncalculating impulsiveness of ordinary life, the chance inspirations of ordinary thought. But the Peripatetic who chose knowledge as his highest good differed widely from the Hedonist who made pleasure or painlessness his end; and even if they agreed in thinking that the highest pleasure is yielded by knowledge, the Stoic himself would assert that the object of their common pursuit was with both alike essentially unmoral. He would, no doubt, maintain that the self-consistency of any theory but his own was a delusion and that all false moralities would, if consistently acted out, inevitably land their professors in a contradiction.³ Yet the absence of contradiction, although a valuable verification, is too negative a mark to serve for the sole test of rightness; and thus we are led on to the more specific standard of conformability to nature, whether our own or that of the universe as a whole. Here again a difficulty presents itself. The idea of nature had taken such a powerful hold on the Greek mind that

¹ Zeller, p. 93.

² Stobaeus, *Eclog.*, ii., p. 132, quoted by Ritter and Preller, p. 423 *sg.* (7th ed.); Laert. D., vii., i, 89.

³ 'Quid est sapientia? Semper idem velle atque idem nolle. Licet illam exceptionculam non adicias ut rectum sit quod velis. Non potest cuiquam semper idem placere nisi rectum.' Seneca, *Epist.*, xx., 4.

it was employed by every school in turn—except perhaps by the extreme sceptics, still faithful to the traditions of Protagoras and Gorgias—and was confidently appealed to in support of the most divergent ethical systems. We find it occupying a prominent place both in Plato's *Laws* and in Aristotle's *Politics*; while the maxim, Follow nature, was borrowed by Zeno himself from Polemo, the head of the Academy, or perhaps from Polemo's predecessor, Xenocrates. And Epicurus, the great opponent of Stoicism, maintained, not without plausibility, that every animal is led by nature to pursue its own pleasure in preference to any other end.¹ Thus, when Cleanthes declared that pleasure was unnatural,² he and the Epicureans could not have been talking about the same thing. They must have meant something different by pleasure or by nature or by both.

The last alternative seems the most probable. Nature with the Stoics was a fixed objective order whereby all things work together as co-operant parts of a single system. Each has a certain office to perform, and the perfect performance of it is the creature's virtue, or reason, or highest good: these three expressions being always used as strictly synonymous terms. Here we have the teleology, the dialectics, and the utilitarianism of Socrates, so worked out and assimilated that they differ only as various aspects of a single truth. The three lines of Socratic teaching had also been drawn to a single point by Plato; but his idealism had necessitated the creation of a new world for their development and concentration. The idea of nature as it had grown up under the hands of Heracleitus, the Sophists, and Antisthenes, supplied Zeno with a ready-made mould into which his reforming aspirations could be run. The true Republic was not a pattern laid up in heaven, nor was it restricted to the narrow dimensions of a single Hellenic state. It was the whole real universe, in every part of which except in the works of wicked men a divine law was recognised and obeyed.³ Nay, according to Cleanthes, God's law is obeyed even by the wicked, and the essence of morality consists only in its voluntary fulfilment. As others very vividly put it, we are like a dog tied under a cart; if we do not choose to run we shall be dragged along.⁴

It will now be better understood whence arose the hostility of the Stoics to pleasure, and how they could speak of it in

¹ Cicero, *De Fin.*, i., 9. In this he followed the Cyrenaics; see Laert. D., ii., 8, 87.

² Sextus Emp., *Adv. Math.*, xi., 73.

³ 'Das platonische Gedicht vom himmlischen Gottesstaat hatte durch die stoische Auffassung der Welt als eines vom Göttlichen durchdrungen und beseelten Körpers einen Leib bekommen, in dessen zwingenden Organismus der Einzelne als Glied beschlossen ist und sich fügen muss.' Bruno Bauer, *Christus u. d. Cäsaren*, p. 328.

⁴ Zeller, p. 168, note 2.

what seems such a paradoxical style. It was subjective feeling as opposed to objective law; it was relative, particular, and individual, as opposed to their formal standard of right; and it was continually drawing men away from their true nature by acting as a temptation to vice. Thus, probably for the last reason, Cleanthes could speak of pleasure as contrary to nature; while less rigorous authorities regarded it as absolutely indifferent, being a consequence of natural actions, not an essential element in their performance. And when their opponents pointed to the universal desire for pleasure as a proof that it was the natural end of animated beings, the Stoics answered that what nature had in view was not pleasure at all, but the preservation of life itself.¹

Such an interpretation of instinct introduces us to a new principle—self-interest; and this was, in fact, recognised on all hands as the foundation of right conduct; it was about the question, What is our interest? that the ancient moralists were disagreed. The Cynics apparently held that, for every being, simple existence is the only good, and therefore with them virtue meant limiting oneself to the bare necessities of life; while by following nature they meant reducing existence to its lowest terms, and assimilating our actions, so far as possible, to those of the lower animals, plants, or even stones, all of which require no more than to maintain the integrity of their proper nature.

Where the Cynics left off the Stoics began. Recognising simple self-preservation as the earliest interest and duty of man, they held that his ultimate and highest good was complete self-realisation, the development of that rational, social, and beneficent nature which distinguishes him from the lower animals.² Here their teleological religion came in as a valuable sanction for their ethics. Epictêtus, probably following older authorities, argues that self-love has purposely been made identical with sociability. 'The nature of an animal is to do all things for its own sake. Accordingly God has so ordered the nature of the rational animal that it cannot obtain any particular good without at the same time contributing to the common good. Because it is self-seeking it is not therefore unsocial.'³ But if our happiness depends on external goods, then we shall begin to fight with one another for their possession:⁴ friends, father, country, the gods themselves, everything will, with good reason, be sacrificed to their attainment. And, regarding this as a self-evident absurdity, Epictêtus concludes that our happiness must consist solely in a righteous will, which we know to have been the doctrine of his whole school.

¹ Laert. D., vii., 7, 85.

³ *Dissert.*, i., 19, 11.

² Gellius, *Noct. Att.*, xii., 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22, 9 sqq.

We have now reached the great point on which the Stoic ethics differed from that of Plato and Aristotle. The two last-named philosophers, while upholding virtue as the highest good, allowed external advantages like pleasure and exemption from pain to enter into their definition of perfect happiness; nor did they demand the entire suppression of passion, but, on the contrary, assigned to it a certain part in the formation of character. We must add, although it was not a point insisted on by the ancient critics, that they did not bring out the socially beneficent character of virtue with anything like the distinctness of their successors. The Stoics, on the other hand, refused to admit that there was any good but a virtuous will, or that any useful purpose could be served by irrational feeling. If the passions agree with virtue they are superfluous, if they are opposed to it they are mischievous; and once we give them the rein they are more likely to disagree with than to obey it.¹ The severer school had more reason on their side than is commonly admitted. Either there is no such thing as duty at all, or duty must be paramount over every other motive—that is to say, a perfect man will discharge his obligations at the sacrifice of every personal advantage. There is no pleasure that he will not renounce, no pain that he will not endure, rather than leave them unfulfilled. But to assume this supremacy over his will, duty must be incommensurable with any other motive; if it is a good at all, it must be the only good. To identify virtue with happiness seems to us absurd, because we are accustomed to associate virtue exclusively with those dispositions which are the cause of happiness in others, or altruism; and to associate happiness with pleasure or the absence of pain, which are states of feeling necessarily conceived as egoistic. But neither the Stoics nor any other ancient moralists recognised such a distinction. All agreed that public and private interest must somehow be identified; the only question being, should one be merged in the other, and if so, which? or should there be an illogical compromise between the two. The alternative chosen by Zeno was incomparably nobler than the method of Epicurus, while it was more consistent than the methods of Plato and Aristotle. He regarded right conduct exclusively in the light of those universal interests with which alone it is properly concerned; and if he appealed to the motives supplied by personal happiness, this was a confusion of phraseology rather than of thought.

The treatment of the passions by the Stoic school presents greater difficulties, due partly to their own vacillation, partly to the very indefinite nature of the feelings in question. It will be admitted that here also the claims of duty are supreme. To

¹ Cicero, *Tusc. Disput.*, iv., 19 sqq.

follow the promptings of fear or of anger, of pity or of love, without considering the ulterior consequences of our action, is, of course, wrong. For even if, in any particular instance, no harm comes of the concession, we cannot be sure that such will always be the case; and meanwhile the passion is strengthened by indulgence. And we have also to consider the bad effect produced on the character of those who, finding themselves the object of passion, learn to address themselves to it instead of to reason. Difficulties arise when we begin to consider how far education should aim at the systematic discouragement of strong emotion. Here the Stoics seem to have taken up a position not very consistent either with their appeals to nature or with their teleological assumptions. Nothing strikes one as more unnatural than the complete absence of human feeling; and a believer in design might plausibly maintain that every emotion conduced to the preservation either of the individual or of the race. We find, however, that the Stoics, here as elsewhere reversing the Aristotelian method, would not admit the existence of a psychological distinction between reason and passion. According to their analysis, the emotions are so many different forms of judgment. Joy and sorrow are false opinions respecting good and evil in the present: desire and fear, false opinions respecting good and evil in the future.¹ But, granting a righteous will to be the only good, and its absence the only evil, there can be no room for any of these feelings in the mind of a truly virtuous man, since his opinions on the subject of good are correct, and its possession depends entirely on himself. Everything else arises from an external necessity, to strive with which would be useless because it is inevitable, foolish because it is beneficent, and impious because it is supremely wise.

It will be seen that the Stoics condemned passion not as the cause of immoral actions but as intrinsically vicious in itself. Hence their censure extended to the rapturous delight and passionate grief which seem entirely out of relation to conduct properly so called. This was equivalent to saying that the will has complete control over emotion; a doctrine which our philosophers did not shrink from maintaining. It might have been supposed that a position which the most extreme supporters of free-will would hardly accept, would find still less favour with an avowedly necessarian school. And to regard the emotions as either themselves beliefs, or as inevitably caused by beliefs, would seem to remove them even farther from the sphere of moral responsibility. The Stoics, however, having arrived at the perfectly true doctrine that judgment is a form of volition, seem to have immediately invested it as such with the

¹ Cic., *Tusc. Disput.*, iv., 6.

old associations of free choice which they were at the same time busily engaged in stripping off from other exercises of the same faculty. They took up the Socratic paradox that virtue is knowledge; but they would not agree with Socrates that it could be instilled by force of argument. To them vice was not so much ignorance as the obstinate refusal to be convinced.¹

The Stoic arguments are, indeed, when we come to analyse them, appeals to authority rather than to the logical understanding. We are told again and again that the common objects of desire and dread cannot really be good or evil, because they are not altogether under our control.² And if we ask why this necessarily excludes them from the class of things to be pursued or avoided, the answer is that man, having been created for perfect happiness, must also have been created with the power to secure it by his own unaided exertions. But, even granting the very doubtful thesis that there is any ascertainable purpose in creation at all, it is hard to see how the Stoics could have answered any one who chose to maintain that man is created for enjoyment; since, judging by experience, he has secured a larger share of it than of virtue, and is just as capable of gaining it by a mere exercise of volition. For the professors of the Porch fully admitted that their ideal sage had never been realised; which, with their opinions about the indivisibility of virtue, was equivalent to saying that there never had been such a thing as a good man at all. Or, putting the same paradox into other words, since the two classes of wise and foolish divide humanity between them, and since the former class has only an ideal existence, they were obliged to admit that mankind are not merely most of them fools, but all fools. And this, as Plutarch has pointed out in his very clever attack on Stoicism, is equivalent to saying that the scheme of creation is a complete failure.³

IV

The inconsistencies of a great philosophical system are best explained by examining its historical antecedents. I have already attempted to disentangle the roots from which Stoicism was nourished, but one of the most important has not yet been taken into account. This was the still continued influence of Parmenides, derived, if not from his original teaching, then from some one or more of the altered shapes through which it had passed. It has been shown how Zeno used the Heracleitean method to break down all the demarcations laboriously built up

¹ Zeller, p. 229.

² See the *Dissertations* of Epictétus throughout.

³ Plutarch, *De Communibus Notitiis*, cap. xxxiii., p. 1076 B.

by Plato and Aristotle. Spirit was identified with matter; ideas with aerial currents; God with the world; rational with sensible evidence; volition with judgment; and emotion with thought. But the idea of a fundamental antithesis, expelled from every other department of enquiry, took hold with all the more energy on what, to Stoicism, was the most vital of all distinctions—that between right and wrong.¹ Once grasp this transformation of a metaphysical into a moral principle, and every paradox of the system will be seen to follow from it with logical necessity. What the supreme Idea had been to Plato and self-thinking thought to Aristotle, that virtue became to the new school, simple, unchangeable, and self-sufficient. It must not only be independent of pleasure and pain, but absolutely incommensurable with them; therefore there can be no happiness except what it gives. As an indivisible unity, it must be possessed entirely or not at all; and being eternal, once possessed it can never be lost. Further, since the same action may be either right or wrong, according to the motive of its performance, virtue is nothing external, but a subjective disposition, a state of the will and the affections; or, if these are to be considered as judgments, a state of the reason. Finally, since the universe is organised reason, virtue must be natural, and especially consonant to the nature of man as a rational animal; while, at the same time, its existence in absolute purity being inconsistent with experience, it must remain an unattainable ideal.

It has been shown in former parts of this work how Greek philosophy, after straining an antithesis to the utmost, was driven by the very law of its being to close or bridge over the chasm by a series of accommodations and transitions. To this rule Stoicism was no exception; and perhaps its extraordinary vitality may have been partly due to the necessity imposed on its professors of continually revising their ethics, with a view to softening down its most repellent features. I proceed to sketch in rapid outline the chief artifices employed for this purpose.

The doctrine, in its very earliest form, had left a large neutral ground between good and evil, comprehending almost all the common objects of desire and avoidance. These the Stoics now proceeded to divide according to a similar principle of arrangement. Whatever, without being morally good in the strictest sense, was either conducive to morality, or conformable to human nature, or both, they called preferable. Under this head came personal advantages, such as mental accomplishments, beauty, health, strength, and life itself; together with external advantages, such as wealth, honour, and high connexions.

¹ Cf. Zeller, p. 583.

The opposite to preferable things they called objectionable; and what lay between the two, such as the particular coin selected to make a payment with, absolutely indifferent.¹

The thorough-going condemnation of passion was explained away to a certain extent by allowing the sage himself to feel a slight touch of the feelings which fail to shake his determination, like a scar remaining after the wound is healed; and by admitting the desirability of sundry emotions, which, though carefully distinguished from the passions, seem to have differed from them in degree rather than in kind.²

In like manner, the peremptory alternative between consummate wisdom and utter folly was softened down by admitting the possibility of a gradual progress from one to the other, itself subdivided into a number of more or less advanced grades, recalling Aristotle's idea of motion as a link between Privation and Form.³

If there be a class of persons who although not perfectly virtuous are on the road to virtue, it follows that there are moral actions which they are capable of performing. These the Stoics called intermediate or imperfect duties; and, in accordance with their intellectual view of conduct, they defined them as actions for which a probable reason might be given; apparently in contradistinction to those which were deduced from a single principle with the extreme rigour of scientific demonstration. Such intermediate duties would have for their appropriate object the ends which, without being absolutely good, were still relatively worth seeking, or the avoidance of what, without being an absolute evil, was allowed to be relatively objectionable. They stood midway between virtue and vice, just as the progressive characters stood between the wise and the foolish, and preferable objects between what was really good and what was really evil.⁴

The idea of such a provisional code seems to have originated with Zeno; but the form under which we now know it is the result of at least two successive revisions. The first and most important is due to Panaetius, a Stoic philosopher of the second century B.C., on whose views the study of Plato and Aristotle exercised a considerable influence. A work of this teacher on the *Duties of Man* furnished Cicero with the materials for his celebrated *De Officiis*, under which form its lessons have passed into the educational literature of modern Europe. The Latin treatise is written in a somewhat frigid and uninteresting style, whether through the fault of Cicero or of his guide we cannot tell. The principles laid down are excellent, but there is no vital bond of union holding them together. We can hardly

¹ Zeller, pp. 260-1.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 267-8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁴ Cicero, *De Fin.*, iii., 17; *Acad.*, ii., 10; *De Off.*, i., 3.

imagine that the author's son, for whom the work was originally designed, or any one else since his time, felt himself much benefited by its perusal. Taken, however, as a register of the height reached by ordinary educated sentiment under the influence of speculative ideas, and of the limits imposed by it in turn on their vagaries, after four centuries of continual interaction, the *De Officiis* presents us with very satisfactory results. The old quadripartite division of the virtues is reproduced; but each is treated in a large and liberal spirit, marking an immense advance on Aristotle's definitions, wherever the two can be compared. Wisdom is identified with the investigation of truth; and there is a caution against believing on insufficient evidence, which advantageously contrasts with what were soon to be the lessons of theology on the same subject. The other great intellectual duty inculcated is to refrain from wasting our energies on difficult and useless enquiries.¹ This injunction has been taken up and very impressively repeated by some philosophers in our own time; but in the mouth of Cicero it probably involved much greater restrictions on the study of science than they would be disposed to admit. And the limits now prescribed to speculation by Positivism will perhaps seem not less injudicious, when viewed in the light of future discoveries, than those fixed by the ancient moralists seem to us who know what would have been lost had they always been treated with respect.

The obligations of justice come next. They are summed up in two precepts that leave nothing to be desired: the first is to do no harm except in self-defence; the second, to bear our share in a perpetual exchange of good offices. And the foundation of justice is rightly placed in the faithful fulfilment of contracts—an idea perhaps suggested by Epicurus.² The virtue of fortitude is treated with similar breadth, and so interpreted as to cover the whole field of conduct, being identified not only with fearlessness in the face of danger, but with the energetic performance of every duty. In a word, it is opposed quite as much to slothfulness and irresolution as to physical timidity.³ Temperance preserves its old meaning of a reasonable restraint exercised over the animal passions and desires; and furthermore, it receives a very rich significance as the quality by which we are enabled to discern and act up to the part assigned to us in life by natural endowment, social position, and individual choice. But this, as one of the most important ideas contributed by Stoicism to subsequent thought, must be reserved for separate discussion in the following section.

In addition to its system of intermediate duties, the Stoic ethics included a code of casuistry which, to judge by some

¹ *Op. cit.*, i., 6.

² i., 8.

³ i., 18-23.

recorded specimens, allowed a very startling latitude both to the ideal sage and to the ordinary citizen. Thus, if Sextus Empiricus is to be believed, the Stoics saw nothing objectionable about the trade of a courtesan.¹ Chrysippus, like Socrates and Plato, denied that there was any harm in falsehoods if they were told with a good intention. Diogenes of Seleucia thought it permissible to pass bad money,² and to sell defective articles without mentioning their faults;³ he was, however, contradicted on both points by another Stoic, Antipater. Still more discreditable were the opinions of Hecato, a disciple of Panaetius. He discussed the question whether a good man need or need not feed his slaves in a time of great scarcity, with an evident leaning towards the latter alternative; and also made it a matter of deliberation whether in case part of a ship's cargo had to be thrown overboard, a valuable horse or a worthless slave should be the more readily sacrificed. His answer is not given; but that the point should ever have been mooted does not say much for the rigour of his principles or for the benevolence of his disposition.⁴ Most outrageous of all, from the Stoic point of view, is the declaration of Chrysippus that Heracleitus and Pherecydes would have done well to give up their wisdom, had they been able by so doing to get rid of their bodily infirmities at the same time.⁵ That overstrained theoretical severity should be accompanied by a corresponding laxity in practice is a phenomenon of frequent occurrence; but that this laxity should be exhibited so undisguisedly in the details of the theory itself, goes beyond anything quoted against the Jesuits by Pascal, and bears witness, after a fashion, to the extraordinary sincerity of Greek thought.⁶

It was not, however, in any of these concessions that the Stoics found from first to last their most efficient solution for the difficulties of practical experience, but in the countenance they extended to an act which, more than any other, might have seemed fatally inconsistent both in spirit and in letter with their whole system, whether we choose to call it a defiance of divine law, a reversal of natural instinct, a selfish abandonment of duty, or a cowardly shrinking from pain. I refer, of course, to their habitual recommendation of suicide. 'If you are not satisfied with life,' they said, 'you have only got to rise and depart; the door is always open.' Various circumstances were specified in which the sage would exercise the privilege of 'taking himself off,' as they euphemistically expressed it. Severe pain, mutilation, incurable disease, advanced old age, the hopelessness of escaping from tyranny, and in general any

¹ *Pyrrh. Hyp.*, iii., 201.

³ *Cic., Op. cit.*, iii., 12.

⁵ Plutarch, *De Comm. Notit.*, xi., 8.

² *Cic., De Off.*, iii., 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶ Cf. Zeller, pp. 263-4, 278-84.

hindrance to leading a 'natural' life, were held to be a sufficient justification for such a step.¹ The first founders of the school set an example afterwards frequently followed. Zeno is said to have hanged himself for no better reason than that he fell and broke his finger through the weakness of old age; and Cleanthes, having been ordered to abstain temporarily from food, resolved, as he expressed it, not to turn back after going halfway to death.² This side of the Stoic doctrine found particular favour in Rome, and the voluntary death of Cato was always spoken of as his chief title to fame. Many noble spirits were sustained in their defiance of the imperial despotism by the thought that there was one last liberty of which not even Caesar could deprive them. Objections were silenced by the argument that, life not being an absolute good, its loss might fairly be preferred to some relatively greater inconvenience.³ But why the sage should renounce an existence where perfect happiness depends entirely on his own will, neither was, nor could it be, explained.

V

If now, abandoning all technicalities, we endeavour to estimate the significance and value of the most general ideas contributed by Stoicism to ethical speculation, we shall find that they may be most conveniently considered under the following heads. First of all, the Stoics made morality completely inward. They declared that the intention was equivalent to the deed, and that the wish was equivalent to the intention—a view which has been made familiar to all by the teaching of the Gospel, but the origin of which in Greek philosophy has been strangely ignored even by rationalistic writers.⁴ From the inaccessibility of motives and feelings to direct external observation, it follows that each man must be, in the last resort, his own judge. Hence the notion of conscience is equally a Stoic creation. That we have a mystical intuition informing us, prior to experience, of the difference between right and wrong is, indeed, a theory quite alien to their empirical derivation of knowledge. But that the educated wrongdoer carries in his bosom a perpetual witness and avenger of his guilt, they most distinctly asserted.⁵ The difference

¹ Laert. D., vii., 1, 130; Cic., *De Fin.*, iii., 18; Zeller, pp. 305-9.

² Laert. D., vii., 1, 31; 5, 176.

³ Plutarch, *De Stoic. Repug.*, xviii., 5.

⁴ 'Omnia scelera, etiam ante effectum operis, quantum culpaе satis est, perfecta sunt.'—Seneca, *De Const. Sap.*, vii., 4. Cp. Zeno *apud* Sext. Emp., *Adv. Math.*, xi., 190.

⁵ 'Prope est a te Deus, tecum est, intus est . . . sacer intra nos spiritus sedet bonorum malorumque nostrorum observator et custos.'—Seneca, *Epp.*, xli., 1. Cp. Horace, *Epp.*, i., 1, 61; Lucan, ix., 573; Persius, iii., 43; Juvenal, xiii., 192-235.

between ancient and modern tragedy is alone sufficient to prove the novelty and power of this idea ; for that the Eumenides do not represent even the germ of a conscience is as certain as anything in mythology can be.¹ On the other hand, the fallibility of conscience and the extent to which it may be sophisticated were topics not embraced within the limits of Stoicism, and perhaps never adequately illustrated by any writer, even in modern times, except the greatest of English novelists who has taught morality through fiction—George Eliot.

The second Stoic idea to which I would invite attention is that, in the economy of life, every one has a certain function to fulfil, a certain part to play, which is marked out for him by circumstances beyond his control, but in the adequate performance of which his duty and dignity are peculiarly involved. It is true that this idea finds no assignable place in the teaching of the earliest Stoics, or rather in the few fragments of their teaching which alone have been preserved ; but it is touched upon by Cicero under the head of Temperance, in the adaptation from Panaetius already referred to ; it frequently recurs in the lectures of Epictétus ; and it is enunciated with energetic concision in the solitary meditations of Marcus Aurelius.² The belief spoken

¹ It may be desirable to give some reasons in support of this opinion, as the contrary has been stated by scholars writing within a comparatively recent period. Thus Welcker says : 'Das Gewissen ward bei den Griechen als ein göttliches Wesen, Erinyes, geschaut und wie wir es sonst nicht finden, zur Gottheit erhoben' (*Griechische Götterlehre*, i., 233) ; and again (p. 699) 'Ἐρινός . . . ist das Gewissen.' Similarly, M. Alfred Maury observes that, 'les remords se personnifiaient sous la forme de déesses Erinnyies, chargées de punir tous les forfaits' (*Histoire des Religions de la Grèce Antique*, i., 342). And Preller, while entertaining sounder views respecting their origin, contents himself with the caution that, 'Man sich hüten muss die Furien blos für die subjectiven Mächte des menschlichen Gewissen zu halten' (*Griechische Mythologie*, i., 686, 3rd ed.). Now, in the first place, the Erinyes did not punish all crime, as they ought to have done had they represented conscience. According to Aeschylus (*Eumen.*, 604–5), they considered that the murder of her husband by Clytaemnestra was no affair of theirs, there being no blood relationship between the parties concerned. They did not persecute Electra, who, short of striking the fatal blow, had as much hand in her mother's death as Orestes. And even when a father was killed by his son, they do not always seem to have taken up the matter ; for in the *Odyssey* it is not by the Erinyes of Laius, but by those of Epicastê that Oedipus is pursued—a conception very unlike that of Sophocles, who makes him feel as much remorse for the parricide as for the incest and its consequences. In the next place, the Erinyes are let loose not by the action itself but by the curses of the injured or offended blood-relation, as we see by Homer, *II.*, ix., 454 and 566 ; which seems to show that if they personified anything human it was the imprecations of the victim, not the self-reproach of the aggressor. Thirdly, the Orestes of Aeschylus, so far from feeling conscience-smitten, disclaims all responsibility for his mother's death, inflicted as it was in consequence of a direct command from the higher gods, accompanied by threats of heavy punishment in case of disobedience (*Eumen.*, 443 *sqq.*). And, finally, the office assigned to the Erinyes of seeing that the laws of nature are not broken shows that the Greeks conceived their existence as something altogether objective and physical. There is a short but very sensible account of the Erinyes in Keightley's *Mythology*, p. 175, 4th ed.

² Cicero, *De Off.*, i., 31 ; Epictét., *Man.*, 17, 30 ; *Diss.*, i., 2, 32 ; 16, 20 ; 29, 39 ; ii., 5, 10, *ib.*, 21 ; 10, 4 ; 14, 8 ; Marcus Aurelius, *Comm.*, vi., 39, 43 ; ix., 29 ; cp. Seneca, *Epp.*, lxxxv., 34, and the saying of Marcus Aurelius quoted by Dion Cassius

of is, indeed, closely connected with the Stoic teleology, and only applies to the sphere of free intelligence a principle like that supposed to regulate the activity of inanimate or irrational beings. If every mineral, every plant, and every animal has its special use and office, so also must we, according to the capacity of our individual and determinate existence. By accomplishing the work thus imposed on us, we fulfil the purpose of our vocation, we have done all that the highest morality demands, and may with a clear conscience leave the rest to fate. To put the same idea into somewhat different terms : we are born into certain relationships, domestic, social, and political, by which the lines of our daily duties are prescribed with little latitude for personal choice. What does depend upon ourselves is to make the most of these conditions and to perform the tasks arising out of them in as thorough a manner as possible. 'It was not only out of ivory,' says Seneca, 'that Pheidias could make statues, but out of bronze as well ; had you offered him marble or some cheaper material still, he would have carved the best that could be made out of that. So the sage will exhibit his virtue in wealth, if he be permitted ; if not, in poverty ; if possible, in his own country ; if not, in exile ; if possible, as a general ; if not, as a soldier ; if possible, in bodily vigour ; if not, in weakness. Whatever fortune be granted him, he will make it the means for some memorable achievement.'¹ Or, to take the more homely comparisons of Epictëtus : 'The weaver does not manufacture his wool, but works up what is given him.'² 'Remember that you are to act in whatever drama the manager may choose, a long or short one according to his pleasure. Should he give you the part of a beggar, take care to act that becomingly ; and the same should it be a lame man, or a magistrate, or a private citizen. For your business is to act well the character that is given to you, but to choose it is the business of another.' So spoke the humble freedman ; but the master of the world had also to recognise what fateful limits were imposed on his beneficent activity. 'Why wait, O man !' exclaims Marcus Aurelius. 'Do what nature now demands ; make haste and look not round to see if any know it ; nor hope for Plato's Republic, but be content with the smallest progress, and consider that the result even of this will be no little thing.'³ Carlyle was not a Stoic ; but in this respect his teaching breathes the best spirit of Stoicism ; and, to the same extent also, through his whole life he practised what he taught.

The implications of such an ethical standard are, on the

(*Epit.*, LXXI., xxxiv., 4), that we cannot make men what we wish them to be ; we can only turn what faculties they have to the best account in working for the public good.

¹ *Ep.*, lxxxv., 34.

² *Diss.*, ii., 5, 21.

³ ix., 29.

whole, conservative ; it is assumed that social institutions are, taking them altogether, nearly the best possible at any moment ; and that our truest wisdom is to make the most of them, instead of sighing for some other sphere where our grand aspirations or volcanic passions might find a readier outlet for their feverish activity. And if the teaching of the first Stoics did not take the direction here indicated, it was because they, with the communistic theories inherited from their Cynic predecessors, began by condemning all existing social distinctions as irrational. They wished to abolish local religion, property, the family, and the State, as a substitute for which the whole human race was to be united under a single government, without private possessions or slaves, and with a complete community of women and children.¹ It must, however, have gradually dawned on them that such a radical subversion of the present system was hardly compatible with their belief in the providential origin of all things ; and that, besides this, the virtues which they made it so much their object to recommend, would be, for the most part, superfluous in a communistic society. At the same time, the old notion of *Sôphrosynê* as a virtue which consisted in minding one's own business, or, stated more generally, in discerning and doing whatever work one is best fitted for, would continue to influence ethical teaching, with the effect of giving more and more individuality to the definition of duty. And the Stoic idea of a perfect sage, including as it did the possession of every accomplishment and an exclusive fitness for discharging every honourable function, would seem much less chimerical if interpreted to mean that a noble character, while everywhere intrinsically the same, might be realised under as many divergent forms as there are opportunities for continuous usefulness in life.²

We can understand, then, why the philosophy which, when first promulgated, had tended to withdraw its adherents from participation in public life, should, when transplanted to Roman soil, have become associated with an energetic interest in politics ; why it was so eagerly embraced by those noble statesmen who fought to the death in defence of their ancient liberties ; how it could become the cement of a senatorial opposition under the worst Caesars ; how it could be the inspiration and support of Rome's Prime Minister during that *quinquennium Neronis* which was the one bright episode in more than half a century of shame and terror ; how, finally, it could mount the throne with Marcus Aurelius, and prove, through his example, that the world's work might be most faithfully performed by one in whose

¹ Plutarch, *De Alex. Virt.*, i., 6 ; Laert. D., vii., 33.

² It need hardly be observed that here also the morality of natural law has attained its highest artistic development under the hand of George Eliot—sometimes even to the neglect of purely artistic effect, as in *Daniel Deronda* and the *Spanish Gypsy*.

meditations mere worldly interests occupied the smallest space. Nor does Zeller seem justified in thinking that it was the nationality, and not the philosophy, of these disciples which made them such efficient statesmen.¹ On the contrary, it seems reasonable to hold that the 'Romanism' of these men was inseparable from their philosophy, and that they were all the more Roman because they were Stoics as well.

The third great idea of Stoicism was its doctrine of humanity. Men are all children of one Father, and citizens of one State; the highest moral law is, Follow nature; and nature has made them to be social and to love one another; the private interest of each is, or should be, identified with the universal interest; we should live for others that we may live for ourselves; even to our enemies we should show love and not anger; the unnaturalness of passion is proved by nothing more clearly than by its anti-social and destructive tendencies. Here, also, the three great Stoics of the Roman empire—Seneca, Epictétus, and Marcus Aurelius—rather than the founders of the school, must be our authorities;² whether it be because their lessons correspond to a more developed state of thought, or simply because they have been more perfectly preserved. The former explanation is, perhaps, the more generally accepted. There seems, however, good reason for believing that the idea of universal love—the highest of all philosophical ideas next to that of the universe itself—dates further back than is commonly supposed. It can hardly be due to Seneca, who had evidently far more capacity for popularising and applying the thoughts of others than for original speculation, and who on this subject expresses himself with a rhetorical fluency not usually characterising the exposition of new discoveries. The same remark applies to his illustrious successors, who, while agreeing with him in tone, do not seem to have drawn on his writings for their philosophy. It is also clear that the idea in question springs from two essentially Stoic conceptions: the objective conception of a unified world, a cosmos to which all men belong; and the subjective conception of a rational nature common to them all. These, again, are rooted

¹ Zeller, p. 297, followed by Mr. Capes, in his excellent little work on Stoicism (p. 51).

² Seneca, *De Irâ*, i., 5, 2 *sqq.*; ii., 31, 7; *De Clem.*, i., 3, 2; *De Benef.*, iv., 26, 1, *Epp.*, xcv., 51, *sqq.*; Epictétus, *Diss.*, iv., 5, 10; Antoninus, vii., 13; together with the additional references given by Zeller, p. 286 *sqq.* It is to be observed that the mutual love attributed to human beings by the Stoic philosophers stands, not for an empirical characteristic, but for an unrealised idea of human nature. The actual feelings of men towards one another are described by Seneca in language recalling that of Schopenhauer and Leopardi. 'Erras,' he exclaims, 'si istorum tibi qui occurrunt vultibus credis; hominum effigies habent, animos ferarum: nisi quod illarum perniciosior est primus incursus. Nunquam enim illas ad nocendum nisi necessitas incit: aut fame aut timore coguntur ad pugnam; homini perdere hominem libet.'—*Epp.*, ciii., 2,

in early Greek thought, and were already emerging into distinctness at the time of Socrates. Accordingly we find that Plato, having to compose a characteristic speech for the Sophist Hippias, makes him say that like-minded men are by nature kinsmen and friends to one another.¹ Nature, however, soon came to be viewed under a different aspect, and it was maintained, just as by some modern philosophers, that her true law is the universal oppression of the weak by the strong. Then the idea of mind came in as a salutary corrective. It had supplied a basis for the ethics of Protagoras, and still more for the ethics of Socrates; it was now combined with its old rival by the Stoics, and from their union arose the conception of human nature as something allied with and illustrated by all other forms of animal life, yet capable, if fully developed, of rising infinitely above them. Nevertheless, the individual and the universal element were never quite reconciled in the Stoic ethics. The altruistic quality of justice was clearly perceived; but no attempt was made to show that all virtue is essentially social, and has come to be recognised as obligatory on the individual mainly because it conduces to the safety of the whole community. The learner was told to conquer his passions for his own sake rather than for the sake of others; and indulgence in violent anger, though more energetically denounced, was, in theory, placed on a par with immoderate delight or uncontrollable distress. So also, vices of impurity were classed with comparatively harmless forms of sensuality, and considered in reference, not to the social degradation of their victims, but to the spiritual defilement of their perpetrators.

Yet, while the Stoics were far from anticipating the methods of modern Utilitarianism, they were, in a certain sense, strict Utilitarians—that is to say, they measured the goodness or badness of actions by their consequences; in other words, by their bearing on the supposed interest of the individual or of the community. They did not, it is true, identify interest with pleasure or the absence of pain; but although, in our time, Hedonism and Utilitarianism are, for convenience, treated as interchangeable terms, they need not necessarily be so. Should any one choose to regard bodily strength, health, wealth, beauty, intellect, knowledge, or even simple existence, as the highest good, and the end conduciveness to which determines the morality of actions, he is a Utilitarian; and, even if it could be shown that a maximum of happiness would be ensured by the attainment of his end, he would not on that account become a Hedonist. Now it is certain that the early Stoics, at least, regarded the preservation of the human race as an end which rightfully took precedence of every other consideration;

¹ Plato, *Protagoras*, 337, D.

and, like Charles Austin, they sometimes pushed their principles to paradoxical or offensive extremes, apparently for no other purpose than that of affronting the common feelings of mankind,¹ without remembering that such feelings were likely to represent embodied experiences of utility. Thus—apart from their communistic theories—they were fond of specifying the circumstances in which incest would become legitimate; and they are said not only to have sanctioned cannibalism in cases of extreme necessity, but even to have recommended its introduction as a substitute for burial or cremation; although this, we may hope, was rather a grim illustration of what they meant by moral indifference than a serious practical suggestion.²

Besides the encouragement which it gave to kind offices between friends and neighbours, the Stoic doctrine of humanity and mutual love was honourably exemplified in Seneca's emphatic condemnation of the gladiatorial games and of the horrible abuses connected with domestic slavery in Rome.³ But we miss a clear perception that such abuses are always and everywhere the consequences of slavery; and the outspoken abolitionism of the naturalists referred to by Aristotle does not seem to have been imitated by their successors in later ages.⁴ The most one can say is that the fiction of original liberty was imported into Roman jurisprudence through the agency of Stoic lawyers, and helped to familiarise men's minds with the idea of universal emancipation before political and economical conditions permitted it to be made a reality.

VI.

It is probable that the philanthropic tendencies of the Stoics were, to a great extent, neutralised by the extreme individualism which formed the reverse side of their philosophical character; and also by what may be called the subjective idealism of their ethics. According to their principles, no one can really do good to any one else, since what does not depend on my will is

¹ 'He [Charles Austin] presented the Benthamic doctrines in the most startling form of which they were susceptible, exaggerating everything in them which tended to consequences offensive to any one's preconceived feelings.'—Mill's *Autobiography*, p. 78.

² Zeller, p. 281.

³ 'Homo sacra res homini jam per lusum et jocum occiditur . . . satisque spectaculi ex homine mors est.'—Seneca, *Epp.*, xcv., 33. 'Servi sunt? Immo homines. Servi sunt? Immo contubernales. Servi sunt? Immo humiles amici. Servi sunt? Immo conservi.'—*Ibid.*, xlvii., 1. Compare the treatise *De Ira*, *passim*.

⁴ Seneca once lets fall the words, 'fortuna aequo jure genitos alium alii donavit.'—*Consol. ad Marciam*, xx. 2; but this is the only expression of the kind that I have been able to discover in a Stoic writer of the empire.

not a good to me. The altruistic virtues are valuable, not as sources of beneficent action, but as manifestations of benevolent sentiment. Thus, to set on foot comprehensive schemes for the relief of human suffering seemed no part of the Stoic's business. And the abolition of slavery, even had it been practicable, would have seemed rather superfluous to one who held that true freedom is a mental condition within the reach of all who desire it,¹ while the richest and most powerful may be, and for the most part actually are, without it. Moreover, at the time when philosophy gained its greatest ascendancy, the one paramount object of practical statesmen must have been to save civilisation from the barbarians, a work to which Marcus Aurelius devoted his life. Hence we learn without surprise that the legislative efforts of the imperial Stoic were directed to the strengthening, rather than to the renovation, of ancient institutions.² Certain enactments were, indeed, framed for the protection of those who took part in the public games. It was provided, with a humanity from which even our own age might learn something, that performers on the high rope should be ensured against the consequences of an accidental fall by having the ground beneath them covered with feather beds; and the gladiators were only allowed to fight with blunted weapons.³ It must, however, be noted that in speaking of the combats with wild beasts which were still allowed to continue under his reign, Marcus Aurelius dwells only on the monotonous character which made them exceedingly wearisome to a cultivated mind; just as a philosophic sportsman may sometimes be heard to observe that shooting one grouse is very like shooting another; while elsewhere he refers with simple contempt to the poor wretches who, when already half-devoured by the wild beasts, begged to be spared for another day's amusement.⁴ Whether he knew the whole extent of the judicial atrocities practised on his Christian subjects may well be doubted; but it may be equally doubted whether, had he known it, he would have interfered to save them. Pain and death were no evils; but it was an evil that the law should be defied.⁵

¹ Seneca, *Epp.*, lxxx.

² 'L'empereur avait pour principe de maintenir les anciennes maximes romaines dans leur intégrité.' (Renan's *Marc-Aurèle*, p. 54.) The authority given by M. Renan is Dion Cass., lxi., 34; where, however, there is nothing of the kind stated. Capitolinus says (*Anton. Phil.*, cap. xi.): 'Jus autem magis vetus restituit quam novum fecit.'

³ Renan, p. 30; Capitolinus, *Anton. Phil.*, xii.; Dion Cass., *Epit.*, lxxi., 29, 3.

⁴ Antoninus, *Comm.*, vi., 46; x., 8.

⁵ The expressions used by Renan when treating of this subject are somewhat conflicting. In reference to the penal enactments against Christianity under Marcus Aurelius, he first states that, however objectionable they may have been, 'en tout cas dans l'application la mansuétude du bon empereur fut à l'abri de tout reproche.' (*Marc-Aurèle*, p. 58.) Further on, however, we are told that when the martyrs of

Those manifestations of sympathy which are often so much more precious than material assistance were also repugnant to Stoic principles. On this subject, Epictétus expresses himself with singular harshness. 'Do not,' he says, 'let yourself be put out by the sufferings of your friends. If they are unhappy, it is their own fault. God made them for happiness, not for misery. They are grieved at parting from you, are they? Why, then, did they set their affections on things outside themselves? If they suffer for their folly it serves them right.'¹

On the other hand, if Stoicism did not make men pitiful, it made them infinitely forgiving. Various causes conspired to bring about this result. If all are sinners, and if all sins are equal, no one has a right, under pretence of superior virtue, to cast a stone at his fellows. Such is the point of view insisted on with especial emphasis by Seneca, who, more perhaps than other philosophers, had reason to be conscious how far his practice fell short of his professions.² But, speaking generally, pride was the very last fault with which the Stoics could be charged. Both in ancient and modern times, satirists have been prone to assume that every disciple of the Porch, in describing his ideal of a wise man, was actually describing himself. No misconception could be more complete. It is like supposing that, because Christ commanded his followers to be perfect even as their heavenly Father is perfect, every Christian for that reason thinks himself equal to God. The wise man of the Stoics had, by their own acknowledgment, never been realised at all; he had only been approached by three characters, Socrates, Antisthenes, and Diogenes.³ 'May the sage fall in love?' asked a young man of Panaetius. 'What the sage may do,' replied the master 'is a question to be considered at some future time. Meanwhile, you and I, who are very far from being sages, had better take care not to let ourselves become the slaves of a degrading passion.'⁴

Lyons appealed to Rome, 'la réponse impériale arriva enfin. Elle était dure et cruelle.' (p. 329.) And subsequently Renan makes the Emperor personally responsible for the atrocities practised on that occasion by observing, 'Si Marc-Aurèle, au lieu d'employer les lions et la chaise rouge,' &c. (p. 345.) But perhaps such inconsistencies are to be expected in a writer who has elevated the necessity of perpetual self-contradiction into a principle.

¹ Epictétus, *Diss.*, iii., 24.

² Seneca, *De Irâ*, i., 14, 2; *De Clement.*, i., 6, 2.

³ Diog., vii., 91. Ziegler (*Gesch. d. Ethik*, Bonn, 1882, i., 174) holds, in opposition to Zeller, that originally every Stoic, as such, was assumed to be a perfect sage, and that the question was only whether the ideal had ever been realised outside the school. This, however, goes against the evidence of Plutarch, who tells us (*De Stoic Repug.*, xxxi., 5) that Chrysippus neither professed to be good himself nor supposed that any of his friends or teachers or disciples was good.

⁴ Seneca, *Epp.*, cxvi., 4 sq. It must be borne in mind that Panaetius was speaking at a time when the object of passion would at best be either another man's wife or a member of the *demi-monde*.

In the next place, if it is not in the power of others to injure us, we have no right to resent anything that they can do to us. So argues Epictétus, who began to learn philosophy when still a slave, and was carefully prepared by his instructor, Musonius, to bear without repining whatever outrages his master might choose to inflict on him. Finally, to those who urged that they might justly blame the evil intentions of their assailants, Marcus Aurelius could reply that even this was too presumptuous, that all men did what they thought right, and that the motives of none could be adequately judged except by himself.¹ And all the Stoics found a common ground for patience in their optimistic fatalism, in the doctrine that whatever happens is both necessarily determined, and determined by absolute goodness combined with infallible wisdom.²

Doctrines like these, if consistently carried out, would have utterly destroyed so much of morality as depends on the social sanction; while, by inculcating the absolute indifference of external actions, they might ultimately have paralysed the individual conscience itself. But the Stoics were not consistent. Unlike some modern moralists, who are ready to forgive every injury so long as they are not themselves the victims, our philosophers were unsparing in their denunciations of wrong-doing; and it is very largely to their indignant protests that we are indebted for our knowledge of the corruption prevalent in Roman society under the Empire. It may even be contended that, in this respect, our judgment has been unfairly biassed. The picture drawn by the Stoics, or by writers trained under their influence, seems to have been too heavily charged with shadow; and but for the archaeological evidence we should not have known how much genuine human affection lay concealed in those lower social strata whose records can only be studied on their tombs.³ It was among these classes that Christianity found the readiest acceptance, simply because it gave a supernatural sanction to habits and sentiments already made familiar by the spontaneous tendencies of an unwarlike régime.

VII

Before parting with Stoicism a few words must be said on the metaphysical foundation of the whole system—the theory of nature considered as a moral guide and support. It has been shown that the ultimate object of this, as of many

¹ *Comm.*, vii., 26; xii., 16.

² See especially Antoninus, *Comm.*, ix., 1.

³ Friedländer, *Römische Sittengeschichte*, i., 463; Duruy, *Histoire des Romains*, v., 349 sqq., 370; cp. Gaston Boissier, *La Religion Romaine*, ii., 152 sqq., 212 sqq.

other ethical theories, both ancient and modern, was to reconcile the instincts of individual self-preservation with virtue, which is the instinct of self-preservation in an entire community. The Stoics identified both impulses by declaring that virtue is the sole good of the individual no less than the supreme interest of the whole; thus involving themselves in an insoluble contradiction. For, from their nominalistic point of view, the good of the whole can be nothing but an aggregate of particular goods, or else a means for their attainment; and in either case the happiness of the individual has to be taken into account apart from his duty. And an analysis of the special virtues and vices would equally have forced them back on the assumption, which they persistently repudiated, that individual existence and pleasure are intrinsically good, and their opposites intrinsically evil. To prove their fundamental paradox—the non-existence of individual as distinguished from social interest—the Stoics employed the analogy of an organised body where the good of the parts unquestionably subserves the good of the whole;¹ and the object of their teleology was to show that the universe and, by implication, the human race, were properly to be viewed in that light. The acknowledged adaptation of life to its environment furnished some plausible arguments in support of their thesis; and the deficiencies were made good by a revival of the Heracleitean theory in which the unity of nature was conceived partly as a necessary interdependence of opposing forces, partly as a perpetual transformation of every substance into every other. Universal history also tended to confirm the same principle in its application to the human race. The Macedonian, and still more the Roman empire, brought the idea of a world-wide community living under the same laws ever nearer to its realisation; the decay of the old religion and the old civic patriotism set free a vast fund of altruism which now took the form of simple philanthropy; while a rank growth of immorality offered ever new opportunities for an indignant protest against senseless luxury and inhuman vice. This last circumstance, however, was not allowed to prejudice the optimism of the system; for the fertile physics of Heracleitus suggested a method by which moral evil could be interpreted as a necessary concomitant of good, a material for the perpetual exercise and illustration of virtuous deeds.²

Yet, if the conception of unity was gaining ground, the conceptions of purpose and vitality must have been growing weaker as the triumph of brute force prolonged itself without limit or hope of redress. Hence Stoicism in its later form shows a tendency to dissociate the dynamism of Heracleitus

¹ This idea is most distinctly expressed by Marcus Aurelius, ii., 1, and vii., 13.

² For the authorities see Zeller, p. 176.

from the teleology of Socrates, and to lean on the former rather than on the latter for support. One symptom of this changed attitude is a blind worship of power for its own sake. We find the renunciation of pleasure and the defiance of pain appreciated more from an aesthetic than from an ethical point of view ; they are exalted almost in the spirit of a Red Indian, not as means to higher ends, but as manifestations of unconquerable strength ; and sometimes the highest sanction of duty takes the form of a morbid craving for applause, as if the universe were an amphitheatre and life a gladiatorial game.¹

The noble spirit of Marcus Aurelius was, indeed, proof against such temptations : and he had far more to dread than to hope from the unenlightened voice of public opinion ; but to him also, 'standing between two eternities,' nature presented herself chiefly under the aspect of an overwhelming and absorbing Power. Pleasure is not so much dangerous as worthless, weak, and evanescent. Selfishness, pride, anger, and discontent will soon be swept into abysmal gulfs of oblivion by the roaring cataract of change. Universal history is one long monotonous procession of phantasms passing over the scene into death and utter night. In one short life we may see all that ever was, or is, or is to be ; the same pageant has already been and shall be repeated an infinite number of times. Nothing endures but the process of unending renovation : we must die that the world may be ever young. Death itself only reunites us with the absolute All whence we come, in which we move, and whither we return.² But the imperial sage makes no attempt to explain why we should ever have separated ourselves from it in thought ; or why one life should be better worth living than another in the universal vanity of things.

The physics of Stoicism was, in truth, the scaffolding rather than the foundation of its ethical superstructure. The real foundation was the necessity of social existence, formulated under the influence of a logical exclusiveness first introduced by Parmenides, and inherited from his teaching by every system of philosophy in turn. Yet there is no doubt that Stoic morality was considerably strengthened and steadied by the support it found in conceptions derived from a different order of speculations ; so much so that at last it grew to conscious independence of that support.

Marcus Aurelius, a constant student of Lucretius, seems to have had occasional misgivings with respect to the certainty of

¹ See especially Seneca, *Épp.*, lxiv., and the whole treatise *De Providentiâ*.

² See, *inter alia*, *Comm.*, iv., 3 ; vi., 15, 37 ; vii., 21, 49 ; xi., 1 ; xii., 7, 21, 23, 24, 26, 31, 32.

his own creed ; but they never extended to his practical beliefs. He was determined that, whatever might be the origin of this world, his relation to it should be still the same. ' Though things be purposeless, act not thou without a purpose.' ' If the universe is an ungoverned chaos, be content that in that wild torrent thou hast a governing reason within thyself.'¹

There seems, then, good reason for believing that the law of duty, after being divorced from mythology, and seriously compromised by its association, even among the Stoics themselves, with our egoistic instincts, gained an entirely new authority when placed, at least in appearance, under the sanction of a power whose commands did not even admit of being disobeyed. And the question spontaneously presents itself whether we, after getting rid of the old errors and confusions, may profitably employ the same method in defence of the same convictions, whether the ancient alliance between fact and right can be reorganised on a basis of scientific proof.

A great reformer of the last century, finding that the idea of nature was constantly put forward to thwart his most cherished schemes, prepared a mine for its destruction which was only exploded after his death. Seldom has so powerful a charge of logical dynamite been collected within so small a space as in Mill's famous Essay on Nature. But the immediate effect was less than might have been anticipated, because the attack was supposed to be directed against religion, whereas it was only aimed at an abstract metaphysical dogma, not necessarily connected with any theological beliefs, and held by many who have discarded all such beliefs. A stronger impression was, perhaps, produced by the nearly simultaneous declaration of Sir W. Gull—in reference to the supposed *vis medicatrix naturae*—that, in cases of disease, ' what nature wants is to put the man in his coffin.' The new school of political economists have also done much to show that legislative interference with the ' natural

¹ *Comm.* XI., 28, xii., 14. A modern disciple of Aurelius has expressed himself to the same purpose in slightly different language :—

' Long fed on boundless hopes, O race of man,
How angrily thou spurn'st all simpler fare !
" Christ," some one says, " was human as we are.
No judge eyes us from heaven our sin to scan ;
We live no more, when we have done our span."
" Well, then, for Christ," thou answerest, " who can care ?
From sin, which Heaven records not, why forbear ?
Live we, like brutes, our life without a plan !"
So answerest thou ; but why not rather say :
" Hath man no second life ?—*Pitch this one high !*
Sits there no judge in heaven, our sin to see ?
More strictly, then, the inward judge obey !
Was Christ a man like us ?—*Ah ! let us try*
If we then, too, can be such men as he !"

—*The Better Part*, by Matthew Arnold. The italics are in the original.

laws' of wealth need by no means be so generally mischievous as was once supposed. And the doctrine of Evolution, besides breaking down the old distinctions between nature and man, has represented the former as essentially variable, and therefore, to that extent, incapable of affording a fixed standard for moral action. It is, however, from this school that a new attempt to rehabilitate the old physical ethics has proceeded. The object of Herbert Spencer's *Data of Ethics* is, among other points, to prove that a true morality represents the ultimate stage of evolution, and reproduces in social life that permanent equilibration towards which every form of evolution constantly tends. And Spencer also shows how evolution is bringing about a state of things in which the self-regarding shall be finally harmonised with the social impulses. Now it will be readily admitted that morality is a product of evolution in this sense that it is a gradual formation, that it is the product of many converging conditions, and that it progresses according to a certain method. But that the same method is observed through all orders of evolution seems less evident. For instance, in the formation, first of the solar system, and then of the earth's crust, there is a continual loss of energy, while in the development of organic life there is as continual a gain; and on arriving at subjective phenomena, we are met by facts which, in the present state of our knowledge, cannot advantageously be expressed in terms of matter and motion at all. Even if we do not agree with George Sand in thinking that self-sacrifice is the only virtue, we must admit that the possibility, at least, of its being sometimes demanded is inseparable from the idea of duty. But self-sacrifice cannot be conceived without consciousness; which is equivalent to saying that it involves other than mechanical notions. Thus we are confronted by the standing difficulty of all evolutionary theories, and on a point where that difficulty is peculiarly sensible. Nor is this an objection to be got rid of by the argument that it applies to all philosophical systems alike. To an idealist, the dependence of morality on consciousness is a practical confirmation of his professed principles. Holding that the universal forms of experience are the conditions under which an object is apprehended, rather than modifications imposed by an unknowable object on an unknowable subject, and that these forms are common to all intelligent beings, he holds also that the perception of duty is the widening of our individual selves into that universal self which is the subjective side of all experience.

Again, whatever harmony evolution may introduce into our conceptions, whatever hopes it may encourage with regard to the future of our race, one does not see precisely what sanction it gives to morality at present—that is to say, how it makes

self-sacrifice easier than before. Because certain forces have been unconsciously working towards a certain end through ages past, why should I consciously work towards the same end? If the perfection of humanity is predetermined, my conduct cannot prevent its consummation; if it in any way depends on me, the question returns, why should my particular interests be sacrificed to it? The man who does not already love his contemporaries whom he has seen is unlikely to love them the more for the sake of a remote posterity whom he will never see at all. Finally, it must be remembered that evolution is only half the cosmic process; it is partially conditioned at every stage by dissolution, to which in the long run it must entirely give way; and if, as Herbert Spencer observes, evolution is the more interesting of the two,¹ this preference is itself due to the life-ward tendency of our thoughts; in other words, to those moral sentiments which it is sought to base on what, abstractedly considered, has all along been a creation of their own.

The idea of nature, or of the universe, or of human history as a whole, is one the ethical value of which can be more easily felt than analysed. Mr. Frederic Harrison, in his essay on 'Pantheism and Cosmic Emotion,' has restricted its influence to the aesthetic feelings. The elevating influence of these should be fully recognised; but the place due to more severely intellectual pursuits in moral training is greater far. Whatever studies tend to withdraw us from the petty circle of our personal interests and pleasures, are indirectly favourable to the preponderance of social over selfish impulses; and the service thus rendered is amply repaid, since these very studies necessitate for their continuance a large expenditure of moral energy. It might even be contended that the influence of speculation on practice is determined by the previous influence of practice on speculation. Physical laws act as an armature to the law of duty, extending and perpetuating its grasp on the minds of men; but it was through the magnetism of duty that their confused currents were first drawn into parallelism and harmony with its attraction. We have just seen how, from this point of view, the interpretation of evolution by conscience might be substituted for the interpretation of conscience by evolution. Yet those who base morality on religion, or give faith precedence over works, have discerned with a sure though dim instinct the dependence of noble and far-sighted action on some paramount intellectual initiative and control; in other words, the highest ethical ideals are conditioned by the highest philosophical generalisations. Before the Greeks could think of each man as a citizen of the world, and as bound to all other rational beings by virtue of a common origin and a common

¹ *First Principles*, § 177.

abode, it was first necessary that they should think of the world itself as an orderly and comprehensive whole. And what was once a creative, still continues to work as an educating force. Our aspirations towards agreement with ourselves and with humanity as a whole are strengthened by the contemplation of that supreme unity which, even if it be but the glorified reflection of our individual or generic identity, still remains the idea in and through which those lesser unities were first completely realised—the idea which has originated all man's most fruitful faiths, and will at last absorb them all. Meanwhile our highest devotion can hardly find more fitting utterance than in the prayer which once rose to a Stoic's lips:—

But Jove all-bounteous ! who, in clouds
 enwrap, the lightning wieldest ;
 May'st Thou from baneful Ignorance
 the race of men deliver !
 This, Father ! scatter from the soul,
 and grant that we the wisdom
 May reach, in confidence of which,
 Thou justly guidest all things ;
 That we, by Thee in honour set,
 with honour may repay Thee,
 Raising to all thy works a hymn
 perpetual ; as beseemeth
 A mortal soul : since neither man
 nor god has higher glory
 Than rightfully to celebrate
 Eternal Law all-ruling.¹

¹ From the Hymn of Cleanthes, translated by Francis Newman in *The Soul*, p. 73, fifth edition.

CHAPTER XI

EPICURUS AND LUCRETIVS

I

AMONG the systems of ancient philosophy, Epicureanism is remarkable for the completeness with which its doctrines were worked out by their first author, and for the fidelity with which they were handed down to the latest generation of his disciples. For a period of more than five hundred years, nothing was added to, and nothing was taken away from, the original teaching of Epicurus. In this, as in other respects, it offers a striking contrast to the system which I last reviewed. In studying the Stoic philosophy, we had to notice the continual process of development through which it passed, from its commencement to its close. There is a marked difference between the earlier and the later heads of the school at Athens—between these, as a class, and the Stoics of the Roman empire—and, finally, even between two Stoics who stood so near to one another as Epictëtus and Marcus Aurelius. This contrast cannot be due to external circumstances, for the two systems were exactly coeval, and were exposed, during their whole lifetime, to the action of precisely the same environment. The cause must be sought for in the character of the philosophies themselves, and of the minds which were naturally most amenable to their respective influence. Stoicism retained enough of the Socratic spirit to foster a love of enquiry for its own sake, and an indisposition to accept any authority without a searching examination of its claims to obedience or respect. The learner was submitted to a thorough training in dialectics; while the ideal of life set before him was not a state of rest, but of intense and unremitting toil. Whatever particular conclusions he might carry away with him from the class-room were insignificant in comparison with the principle that he must be prepared to demonstrate them for himself with that self-assurance happily likened by Zeno to the feeling experienced when the clenched fist is held within the grasp of the other hand. Epicurus, on the contrary, did not encourage independent thought among his disciples; nor, with one exception hereafter to be noticed,

did his teaching ever attract any very original or powerful intellect. From the first a standard of orthodoxy was erected ; and, to facilitate their retention, the leading tenets of the school were drawn up in a series of articles which its adherents were advised to learn by heart. Hence, as Wallace observes,¹ while the other chief sects among which philosophy was divided—the Academicians, the Peripatetics, and the Stoics—drew their appellation, not from their first founder, but from the locality where his lectures had been delivered, the Epicureans alone continued to bear the name of a master whom they regarded with religious veneration. Hence, also, we must add with Zeller,² and notwithstanding the doubt expressed by Wallace³ on the subject, that our acquaintance with the system so faithfully adhered to may be regarded as exceptionally full and accurate. The excerpts from Epicurus himself, preserved by Laertius Diogenes, the poem of Lucretius, the criticisms of Cicero, Plutarch, and others, and the fragments of Epicurean literature recovered from the Herculanean papyri, agree so well where they cover the same ground, that they may be fairly trusted to supplement each other's deficiencies ; and a further confirmation, if any was needed, is obtained by consulting the older sources, whence Epicurus borrowed most of his philosophy.

It may safely be assumed that the prejudices once entertained against Epicureanism are now extinct. Whatever may have been the speculative opinions of its founder, he had as good a right to them as the Apostles had to theirs ; nor did he stand further aloof from the popular religion of any age than Aristotle, who has generally been in high favour with theologians. His practical teaching was directed towards the constant inculcation of virtue ; nor was it belied by the conduct either of himself or of his disciples, even judged by the standard of the schools to which they were most opposed. And some of his physical theories, once rejected as self-evidently absurd, are now proved to be in harmony with the sober conclusions of modern science. At any rate, it is not in this quarter that the old prejudices, if they still exist, are likely to find an echo. Just now, indeed, the danger is not that Epicurus should be depreciated, but that his merits should obtain far more than their proper meed of recognition. It seems to be forgotten that what was best in his physics he borrowed from others, and that what he added was of less than no value ; that he was ignorant or careless of demonstrated truths ; that his avowed principles of belief were inconsistent with any truth rising above the level of vulgar apprehension ; and finally, that in his system scientific interests were utterly subordinated to practical interests.

¹ *Epicureanism*, p. 1.

² *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, p. 380.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

In the face of such facts, to say, as Froude does, that Epicureanism was 'the creed of the men of science' in the time of Julius Caesar¹—an assertion directly contradicted by Lange²—is perhaps only of a piece with Froude's usual inaccuracy when writing about ancient history; but such declarations as that of Sir Frederick Pollock, that the Epicurean system 'was a genuine attempt at a scientific explanation of the world; and was in its day the solitary protest against the contempt of physics which prevailed in the other post-Aristotelian schools';³ of Prof. Trezza, that the Epicurean school 'summed up in itself the most scientific elements of Greek antiquity';⁴ of Dr. Woltjer, that 'with respect to the laws and principles of science, the Epicureans came nearest of all the ancients to the science of our own time';⁵ and finally, of Ernest Renan, that Epicureanism was 'the great scientific school of antiquity,'⁶ are absolutely amazing. The eminent French critic just quoted has elsewhere observed, with perfect justice, that the scientific spirit is the negation of the supernatural; and perhaps he argues that the negation of the supernatural must, reciprocally, be the scientific spirit. But this is only true when such a negation is arrived at inductively, after a disinterested survey of the facts. Epicurus started with the denial of supernatural interference as a practical postulate, and then hunted about for whatever explanations of natural phenomena would suit his foregone conclusion. Moreover, an enquirer really animated by the scientific spirit studies the facts for their own sake; he studies them as they actually are, not resting content with alternative explanations; and he studies them to the fullest extent of which his powers are capable. Epicurus, on the contrary, declares that physics would not be worth attending to if the mind could be set free from religious terrors in any other manner;⁷ he will not let himself be tied down to any one theory if there are others equally inconsistent with divine agency to be had;⁸ and when his demands in this respect are satisfied, that is, when the appearances vulgarly ascribed to supernatural causation have been provided with natural causes, he leaves off.

To get rid of superstitious beliefs was, no doubt, a highly meritorious achievement, but it had been far more effectually performed by the great pre-Socratic thinkers, Heracleitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus. These men or their followers had, besides, got hold of a most important principle—the vital principle of all science—which was the

¹ *Short Studies*, iii., p. 246.

² *Gesch. des Mater.*, i., p. 92.

³ Pollock's *Spinoza*, p. 64.

⁴ *Epicuro e l'Epicurismo*, Florence, 1877, p. 29.

⁵ *Lucretii Philosophia cum fontibus comparata*, Groningen, 1877, p. 137.

⁶ *Dialogues Philosophiques*, p. 54, quoted by Woltjer, *loc. cit.*

⁷ Laert. D., x., 142.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

reign of law, the universality and indefeasibility of physical causation. Now, Epicurus expressly refused to accept such a doctrine, declaring that it was even worse than believing in the gods, since they could be propitiated, whereas fate could not.¹ Again, Greek physical philosophy, under the guidance of Plato, had been tending more and more to seek for its foundation in mathematics. Mathematical reasoning was seen to be the type of all demonstration; and the best hopes of progress were staked on the extension of mathematical methods to every field of enquiry in turn. How much might be done by following up this clue was quickly seen not only in the triumphs of geometry, but in the brilliant astronomical discoveries by which the shape of the earth, the phases of the moon, and the cause of eclipses were finally cleared up and placed altogether outside the sphere of conjecture. Nor was a knowledge of these truths confined to specialists: they were familiar alike to the older Academy, to the Peripatetic, and to the Stoic schools; so that, with the exception of those who doubted every proposition, we may assume them to have been then, as now, the common property of all educated men. Epicurus, on the other hand, seems to have known nothing of mathematics, or only enough to dispute their validity, for we are told that his disciple Polyænus, who had previously been eminent in that department, was persuaded, on joining the school, to reject the whole of geometry as untrue;² while, in astronomy, he pronounced the heavenly bodies to be no larger than they appear to our senses, denied the existence of Antipodes, and put the crudest guesses of early philosophy on the same footing with the best-authenticated results of later observation. It is no wonder, then, that during the whole continuance of his school no man of science ever accepted its teaching, with the single exception of Asclepiades, who was perhaps a Democritean rather than a disciple of the Garden, and who, at any rate, as a physiologist, would not be brought into contact with its more flagrant absurdities.

In order to understand how so vigorous an intellect could go so wildly astray, we must glance at his personal history, and at the manner in which his system seems to have been gradually built up.

II

Epicurus was born 341 B.C., about the same time as Zeno the Stoic. Unlike all the other philosophers of his age, he was of Athenian parentage; that is to say, he belonged to a race of exclusively practical tendencies, and marked by a singular

¹ Laert. D., x., 134.

² Cicero, *Acad.*, ii., 33.

inaptitude or distaste for physical enquiries. His father, a poor colonist in Samos, was, apparently, not able to give him a very regular education. At eighteen he was sent to Athens, but was shortly afterwards obliged to rejoin his family, who were driven from Samos in 322, along with the other Athenian settlers, by a political revolution, and had taken refuge in Colophon, on the Asiatic coast. In the course of his wanderings, the future philosopher came across some public lecturers, who seem to have instructed him in the physics of Democritus, and perhaps also in the scepticism of Pyrrho; but of such a steady discipline as Plato passed through during his ten years' intercourse with Socrates, Aristotle during his twenty years' studies under Plato, and Zeno during his similarly protracted attendance at the various schools of Athens, there is no trace whatever. Epicurus always described himself as self-taught, meaning that his knowledge had been acquired by reading instead of by listening; and we find in him the advantages as well as the defects common to self-taught men in all ages—considerable freshness and freedom from scholastic prejudices, along with a certain narrowness of sympathies, incompleteness of information, inaptitude for abstract reasoning, and last, but not least, an enormous opinion of his own abilities, joined to an overweening contempt for those with whose opinions he did not agree. After teaching for some time in Mitylênê, Epicurus established himself as the head of a school in Athens, where he bought a house and garden. In the latter he lectured and gathered round him a band of devoted friends, among whom women were included, and who were wont to assemble for purposes of social recreation not less than of philosophic discipline. Just before his death, which occurred in the year 270, he declared in a letter to his friend and destined successor Hermarchus, that the recollection of his philosophical achievements had been such a source of pleasure as to overcome the agonies of disease, and to make the last day the happiest of his life.¹ For the rest, Epicurus secluded himself, on principle, from the world, and few echoes of his teaching seem to have passed beyond the circle of his immediate adherents. Thus, whatever opportunities might otherwise have offered themselves of profiting by adverse criticism were completely lost.²

Epicureanism was essentially a practical philosophy. The physical, theological, and logical portions of the system were reasoned out with exclusive reference to its ethical end, and their absolute subordination to it was never allowed to be

¹ Cicero, *De Fin.*, ii., 30, 96; Laert. D. x., 22. Cicero translates the words *διαλογισμῶν μνήμη*, 'memoria rationum inventorumque nostrorum.' They may refer merely to the pleasure derived from intellectual conversation.

² The authorities for the life of Epicurus are given by Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 363 sqq.

forgotten. It is therefore with the moral theory of Epicurus that we must begin.

From the time of Socrates on, the majority of Greeks, had they been asked what was the ultimate object of endeavour, or what made life worth living, would have answered, pleasure. But among professional philosophers such a definition of the supreme good met with little favour. Seeing very clearly that the standard of conduct must be social, and convinced that it must at the same time include the highest good of the individual, they found it impossible to believe that the two could be reconciled by encouraging each citizen in the unrestricted pursuit of his own private gratifications. Nor had such an idea as the greatest happiness of the greatest number ever risen above their horizon; although, from the necessities of life itself, they unconsciously assumed it in all their political discussions. The desire for pleasure was, however, too powerful a motive to be safely disregarded. Accordingly we find Socrates frequently appealing to it when no other argument was likely to be equally efficacious, Plato striving to make the private satisfaction of his citizens coincide with the demands of public duty, and Aristotle maintaining that this coincidence must spontaneously result from the consolidation of moral habits; the true test of a virtuous disposition being, in his opinion, the pleasure which accompanies its exercise. One of the companions of Socrates, Aristippus the Cyrenaean, a man who had cut himself loose from every political and domestic obligation, and who was remarkable for the versatility with which he adapted himself to the most varying circumstances, went still further. He boldly declared that pleasure was the sole end worth seeking; coming forward on the strength of this doctrine as the founder of a new philosophical school. According to his system, the *summum bonum* was not the total amount of enjoyment secured in a lifetime, but the greatest single enjoyment that could be secured at any moment; and this principle was associated with an idealistic theory of perception, apparently suggested by Protagoras, but carrying his views much further. Our knowledge, said Aristippus, is strictly limited to phenomena; we are conscious of nothing beyond our own feelings; and we have no right to assume the existence of any objects by which they are caused. The study of natural science is therefore waste of time; our whole energies should be devoted to the interests of practical life.¹ Thus Greek humanism seemed to have found its appropriate sequel in hedonism, which, as an ethical theory, might quote in its favour both the dictates of immediate feeling and the sanction of public opinion.

The Cyrenaic school ended, curiously enough, in pessimism.

¹ Laert. D., ii., 92.

The doctrine that pleasure is the only good, and the doctrine that life yields a preponderance of painful over pleasurable feelings, are severally compatible with a preference of existence to non-existence; when united, as they were by Hêgêsias, a Cyrenaic professor, they logically lead to suicide; and we are told that the public authorities of Alexandria were obliged to order the discontinuance of his lectures, so great was their effect in promoting self-destruction.¹

Meanwhile, hedonism had been temporarily taken up by Plato, and developed into the earliest known form of utilitarianism. In his *Protagoras*, he endeavours to show that every virtue has for its object either to secure a greater pleasure by the sacrifice of a lesser pleasure, or to avoid a greater pain by the endurance of a lesser pain; nothing being taken into account but the interests of the individual agent concerned. Plato afterwards discarded the theory sketched in the *Protagoras* for a higher and more generous, if less distinctly formulated morality; but while ceasing to be a hedonist he remained a utilitarian; that is to say, he insisted on judging actions by their tendency to promote the general welfare, not by the sentiments which they excite in the mind of a conventional spectator.

The idea of virtue as a hedonistic calculus, abandoned by its first originator, and apparently neglected by his immediate successors, was taken up by Epicurus; for that he borrowed it from Plato seems to be proved by the exact resemblance of their language;² and Guyau is quite mistaken when he represents his hero as the founder of utilitarian morality.³ It was not enough, however, to appropriate the cast-off ideas of Plato; it was necessary to meet the arguments by which Plato had been led to think that pleasure was not the supreme good, and to doubt whether it was, as such, a good at all. The most natural course would have been to begin by exhibiting the hedonistic ideal in a more favourable light. Sensual gratifications, from their remarkable intensity, had long been the accepted types of pleasurable feeling, and from their animal character, as well as from other obvious reasons, had frequently been used to excite a prejudice against it. On the other hand, Plato himself, and Aristotle still more, had brought into prominence the superiority, simply as pleasures, of those intellectual activities which they considered to be, even apart from all pleasure, the highest good. But Epicurus refused to avail himself of this opportunity for effecting a compromise with the opposite school, boldly declaring that he for his part could not conceive any pleasures apart

¹ Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, ii., i, p. 341.

² Cp. Plato, *Protag.*, 353, C, ff., with Epicurus in the letter to Menoeceus quoted by Diog., x., 129.

³ *Morale d'Épicure*, p. 20.

from those received through the five senses, among which he, characteristically enough, included aesthetic enjoyments. The obvious significance of his words has been explained away, and they have been asserted to contain only the very harmless proposition that our animal nature is the basis, the condition, of our spiritual nature.¹ But, if this were the true explanation, it would be possible to point out what other pleasures were recognised by Epicurus. These, if they exist at all, must have belonged to the mind as such. Now, we have it on Cicero's authority that, while admitting the existence of mental feelings, both pleasurable and painful, he reduced them to an extension and reflection of bodily feelings, mental happiness properly consisting in the assurance of prolonged and painless sensual gratification. This is something very different from saying that the highest spiritual enjoyments are conditioned by the healthy activity of the bodily organs, or that they cannot be appreciated if the animal appetites are starved. It amounts to saying that there are no specific and positive pleasures apart from the five senses as exercised either in reality or in imagination.² And even without the evidence of Cicero, we can see that some such conclusion necessarily followed from the principles elsewhere laid down by Epicurus. To a Greek, the mental pleasures, *par excellence*, were those derived from friendship and from intellectual activity. But our philosopher, while warmly panegyrising friendship, recommends it not for the direct pleasure which it affords, but for the pain and danger which it prevents;³ while his restriction of scientific studies to the office of dispelling superstitious fears seems meant for a direct protest against Aristotle's opinion, that the highest pleasure is derived from those studies. Equally significant is his outspoken contempt for literary culture.⁴ In this respect, he offers a marked contrast to Aristippus, who, when asked by some one what good his son would get by education, answered, 'This much, at least, that when he is at the play he will not sit like a stone upon a stone,'⁵ the customary attitude, it would seem, of an ordinary Athenian auditor.

It appears, then, that the popular identification of an Epicurean with a sensualist has something to say in its favour. Nevertheless, we have no reason to think that Epicurus was anything but perfectly sincere when he repudiated the charge of being a mere sensualist.⁶ But the impulse which lifted him above sensualism was not derived from his own original philosophy. It was due to the inspiration of Plato; and nothing testifies more to Plato's moral greatness than that

¹ Wallace's *Epicureanism*, p. 154; Guyau, *Morale d'Épicure*, p. 34.

² Laert. D., x., 6; Zeller, iii., 1, pp. 443-4; Cicero, *De Finibus*, ii., 30.

³ Usener, *Épicurea*, p. 324.

⁴ Laert. D., x., 6.

⁵ Laert. D., ii., 72.

⁶ Laert. D., x., 131.

the doctrine most opposed to his own idealism should have been raised from the dust by the example of its flight. I proceed to show how the peculiar form assumed by Epicureanism was determined by the pressure brought to bear on its original germ two generations before.

It had been urged against hedonism that pleasure is a process, a movement; whereas the supreme good must be a completed product—an end in which we can rest. Against sensual enjoyments in particular, it had been urged that they are caused by the satisfaction of appetite, and, as such, must result in a mere negative condition, marking the zero point of pleasurable sentiency. Finally, much stress had been laid on the anti-social and suicidal consequences of that selfish grasping at power to which habits of unlimited self-indulgence must infallibly lead. The form given to hedonism by Epicurus is a reaction against these criticisms, a modification imposed on it for the purpose of evading their force. He seems to admit that bodily satisfaction is rather the removal of a want, and consequently of a pain, than a source of positive pleasure. But the resulting condition of liberation from uneasiness is, according to him, all that we can desire; and by extending the same principle to every other good, he indirectly brings back the mental felicity which at first sight his system threatened either to exclude or to reduce to a mere shadow of sensual enjoyment. For, in calculating the elements of unhappiness, we have to deal, not only with present discomfort, but also, and to a far greater extent, with the apprehension of future evil. We dread the loss of worldly goods, of friends, of reputation, of life itself. We are continually exposed to pain, both from violence and from disease. We are haunted by visions of divine vengeance, both here and hereafter. To get rid of all such terrors, to possess our souls in peace, is the highest good—a permanent, as distinguished from a transient state of consciousness—and the proper business of philosophy is to show us how that consummation may be attained. Thus we are brought back to that blissful self-contemplation of mind which Aristotle had already declared to be the goal of all endeavour and the sole happiness of God.

But Epicurus could only borrow the leading principle of his opponents at the expense of an enormous inconsistency. It was long ago pointed out by the Academicians—and the objection has never been answered—that pleasure and mere painlessness cannot both be the highest good, although the one may be an indispensable condition of the other. To confound the means with the end was, indeed, a common fault of Greek philosophy; and the Stoics also were guilty of it when they defined self-preservation to be the natural object of every creature, and yet

attached a higher value to the instruments than to the aims of that activity. In Epicureanism, however, the change of front was more open, and was attempted under the eyes of acute and vigilant enemies. If the total absence of pain involves a pleasurable state of consciousness, we have a right to ask for a definition or description of it, and this, so far as can be made out, our philosopher never pretended to supply. Of course, a modern psychologist can point out that the functions of respiration, circulation, secretion, and absorption are constantly going on, and that, in their normal activity, they give rise to a vast sum of pleasurable consciousness, which far more than makes up in volume for what it wants in intensity. But, whatever his recent interpreters may say,¹ Epicurus nowhere alludes to this diffused feeling of vitality; had he recognised it, his enumeration of the positive sensations, apart from which the good is inconceivable, would have seemed as imperfect to him as it does to us. If, on the other hand, the complete removal of pain superinduces a state of consciousness, which, without being positively pleasurable, has a positive value of some kind, we ought to be told wherein it differs from the ideals of the spiritualist school; while, if it has no positive value, we ought equally to be told wherein it differs from the unconsciousness of sleep or of death.

III

We have now to see how, granting Epicurus his conception of painlessness as the supreme good, he proceeds to evolve from it a whole ethical, theological, and physical system. For reasons already mentioned, the ethical development must be studied first. We shall therefore begin with an analysis of the particular virtues. Temperance, as the great self-regarding duty, obviously takes precedence of the others. In dealing with this branch of his subject, there was nothing to prevent Epicurus from profiting by the labours of his predecessors, and more especially of the naturalistic school from Prodicus down. So far as moderation is concerned, there need be little difference between a theory of conduct based exclusively on the interests of the individual, and a theory which regards him chiefly as a portion of some larger whole. Accordingly, we find that our philosopher, in his praises of frugality, closely approximated to the Cynic and Stoic standards—so much so, indeed, that his expressions on the subject are repeatedly quoted by Seneca as the best that could be found. Perhaps the Roman moralist valued them less for their own sake than as being, to some extent, the admissions of an opponent. But, in truth, he was only reclaiming what the principles of his own sect had originally inspired. To be content with the barest

¹ Guyau, *Morale d'Épicure*, p. 55.

necessaries was a part of that nature-worship against which Greek humanism, with its hedonistic and idealistic offshoots, had begun by vigorously protesting. Hence many passages in Lucretius express exactly the same sentiments as those which are most characteristic of Latin literature at a time when it is completely dominated by Stoic influences.

It is another Cynic trait in Epicurus that he should address himself to a much wider audience than the Sophists, or even than Socrates and his spiritualistic successors. This circumstance suggested a new argument in favour of temperance. His philosophy being intended for the use of all mankind without exception, was bound to show that happiness is within the reach of the poor as well as of the rich; and this could not be did it depend, to any appreciable extent, on indulgences which wealth alone can purchase. And even the rich will not enjoy complete tranquillity unless they are taught that the loss of fortune is not to be feared, since their appetites can be easily satisfied without it. Thus the pains arising from excess, though doubtless not forgotten, seem to have been the least important motive to restraint in his teaching. The precepts of Epicurus are only too faithfully followed in the southern countries for whose benefit they were first framed. It is a matter of common observation, that the extreme frugality of the Italians, by leaving them satisfied with the barest sufficiency, deprives them of a most valuable spur to exertion, and allows a vast fund of possible energy to moulder away in listless apathy, or to consume itself more rapidly in sordid vice. Moreover, as economists have long since pointed out, where the standard of comfort is high, there will be a large available margin to fall back upon in periods of distress; while where it is low, the limit of subsistence will be always dangerously near.

The enemies of hedonism had taken a malicious satisfaction in identifying it with voluptuous indulgence, and had scornfully asked if that could be the supreme good and proper object of virtuous endeavour, the enjoyment of which was habitually associated with secrecy and shame. It was, perhaps, to screen his system from such reproaches that Epicurus went a long way towards the extreme limit of asceticism, and hinted at the advisability of complete abstinence from that which, although natural, is not necessary to self-preservation, and involves a serious drain on the vital energies.¹ In this respect, he was not followed by Lucretius, who has no objection to the satisfaction of animal instinct, so long as it is not accompanied by personal passion.² Neither the Greek moralist nor the Roman poet could foresee what a great part in the history of civilisation chivalrous devotion to a beloved object was destined to play,

¹ Laert. D., x., 118.

² Lucret., iv., 1057-66.

although the uses of idealised desire had already revealed themselves to Plato's penetrating gaze.

With regard to those more refined aspects of temperance, in which it appears as a restraint exercised by reason over anger, pity, and grief, Epicurus and his followers refused to go all lengths with the Stoics in their effort to extirpate emotion altogether. But here they seem not to have proceeded on any fixed principle, except that of contradicting the opposite school. That the sage will feel pity, and sometimes shed tears,¹ is a sentiment from which few are now likely to dissent; yet the absolute impassivity at which Stoicism aimed seems still more consistent with a philosophy whose ideal was complete exemption from pain; while in practice it would be rather easier to attain than the power of feeling quite happy on the rack, which the accomplished Epicurean was expected to possess.²

Next to Temperance comes Fortitude; and with it the difficulties of reconciling Epicureanism with the ordinary morality are considerably increased. The old conception of this virtue was willingness to face pain and death on behalf of a noble cause,³ which would be generally understood to mean the salvation of family, friends, and fatherland; and the ultimate sanction of such self-devotion was found in the pressure of public opinion. Idealistic philosophy, taking still higher ground, not only refused to balance the fear of pain and death against the fear of infamy or the hope of applause, but added public opinion to the considerations which a good man in the discharge of his duty would, if necessary, despise. Epicurus also inculcated disregard for reputation, except when it might lead to inconveniences of a tangible description;⁴ but he had nothing beyond the calculations of self-interest to put in its place. A modern utilitarian is bound to undergo loss and suffering in his own person for the prevention of greater loss and suffering elsewhere; an egoistic hedonist cannot consistently be brave, except for the sake of his own future security. The method by which Epicurus reconciled interest with courage was to minimise the importance of whatever injuries could be inflicted by external circumstances; just as in his theory of Temperance he had minimised the importance of bodily pleasures. How he disposed of death will best be seen in connexion with his physical philosophy. Pain he encountered by emphasising, or rather immensely exaggerating, the mind's power of annulling external sensation by concentrating its whole attention on remembered or anticipated pleasures,

¹ Laert. D., x., 117 sq.

² Cicero, *De Fin.*, v., 27; Laert. D., *loc. cit.*

³ That is, if we assume what Aristotle says on the subject to be derived from common usage (*Eth. Nic.*, iii., 9, p. 1115, a, 33).

⁴ Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.*, ii., 12, 28.

or else on the certainty that present suffering must come to an end, and to a more speedy end in proportion to its greater severity. We are to hold a fire in our hand, partly by thinking of the frosty Caucasus, partly by the comforting reflection that the pain of a burn, being intense, will not be of long duration ; while, at worst, like the Stoics, we have the resource of suicide as a last refuge from intolerable suffering.¹

With the Epicurean theory of Justice, the distortion, already sufficiently obvious, is carried still further ; although we must frankly admit that it includes some *aperçus* strikingly in advance of all that had hitherto been written on the subject. Justice, according to our philosopher, is neither an internal balance of the soul's faculties, nor a rule imposed by the will of the stronger, but a mutual agreement to abstain from aggressions, varying from time to time with the varying interests of society, and always determined by considerations of general utility.² This is excellent : we miss, indeed, the Stoic idea of a common humanity, embracing, underlying, and transcending all particular contracts ; but we have, in exchange, the idea of a general interest equivalent to the sum of private interests, together with the means necessary for their joint preservation ; and we have also the form under which the notion of justice originates, though not the measure of its ultimate expansion, which is regard for the general interest, even when we are not bound by any contract to observe it. But when we go on to ask why contracts should be adhered to, Epicurus has no reason to offer beyond dread of punishment. His words, as translated by Prof. Wallace, are :—' Injustice is not in itself a bad thing, but only in the fear arising from anxiety on the part of the wrong-doer that he will not always escape punishment.'³ This was evidently meant for a direct contradiction of Plato's assertion, that, apart from its penal consequences, injustice is a disease of the soul, involving more mischief to the perpetrator than to the victim. Prof. Wallace, however, takes a different view of his author's meaning. According to him,

If we interpret this doctrine, after the example of some of the ancients, to mean that any wrong-doing would be innocent and good, supposing it escaped detection, we shall probably be misconstruing Epicurus. What he seems to allude to is rather the case of strictly legal enactments, where, previously to law, the action need not have been particularly moral or immoral ; where, in fact, the common agreement has established a rule which is not completely in harmony with the 'justice of nature.' In short, Epicurus is protesting against the conception of injustice, which makes it consist in disobedience to political and social

¹ Cicero, *De Fin.*, i., 15 ; v., 26.

² Laert. D., x., 150 *sqq.*

³ Wallace, p. 162 ; L. D., *loc. cit.*

rules, imposed and enforced by public and authoritative sanctions. He is protesting, in other words, against the claims of the State upon the citizens for their complete obedience; against the old ideas of the divine sanctity and majesty of law as law; against theories like that maintained by contemporaries of Socrates, that there could be no such thing as an unjust law.¹

Epicurus was assuredly not a master of language, but had he meant all that is here put into his mouth, he would hardly have been at a loss for words to say it. Remembering that the *Kύριαι δόξαι* constituted a sort of creed drawn up by the master himself for his disciples to learn by heart,² and that the incriminated passage is one of the articles in that creed, we need only look at the context to make certain that it has been entirely misread by his apologist.³ In the three preceding articles, we are told that justice is by nature a contract for the prevention of aggressions, that it does not exist among animals which are unable, nor among tribes of men which are either unable or unwilling to enter into such an agreement, and—with reiterated emphasis—that, apart from contracts, it has no original existence (*οὐκ ἦν τὶ καθ' ἑαυτὸ δικαιοσύνη*). There is nothing at all about a true as distinguished from a false justice; there is no allusion whatever to the theories of any 'contemporaries of Socrates;' the polemic reference, if any, is to Plato, and to Plato alone. Then comes the declaration quoted above, to the effect that injustice is not an evil in itself, but only an evil through the dread of punishment which it produces. Now, by injustice, Epicurus must simply mean the opposite of what he defined justice to be in the preceding paragraph—that is, a breach of the agreement not to hurt one another (*μὴ βλάπτειν ἀλλήλους*). The authority of the State is evidently conceived, not as superseding, but as enforcing agreements. The succeeding article still further confirms the view rejected by Prof. Wallace. Epicurus tells us that no man who stealthily evades the contract to abstain from mutual aggressions can be sure of escaping detection. This is evidently added to show that, apart from any mystical sanctions, fear of punishment is quite enough to deter a prudent man from committing crimes. And we can see that no other deterrent was recognised by Lucretius, when, in evident reference to his master's words, he mentions the fears of those who offend—not against mere conventional rules, but against human rights in general—as the great safeguard of justice.⁴

We may, indeed, fairly ask what guarantee against wrongdoing of any kind could be supplied by a system which made

¹ *Epicureanism*, pp. 162-3.

² Cicero, *De Fin.*, ii., 7; *De Nat. Deor.*, i., 30.

³ L. D., x., 150 sq.

⁴ v., 1145-59.

the supreme good of each individual consist in his immunity from pain and fear, except that very pain or fear which he was above all things to avoid? The wise man might reasonably give his assent to enactments intended for the common good of all men, including himself among the number; but when his concrete interest as a private citizen came into collision with his abstract interests as a social unit, one does not see how the quarrel was to be decided on Epicurean principles, except by striking a balance between the pains respectively resulting from justice and injustice. Here, Epicurus, in his anxiety to show that hedonism, rightly understood, led to the same results as the accepted systems of morality, over-estimated the policy of honesty. There are cases in which the wrong-doer may count on immunity from danger with more confidence than when entering on such ordinary enterprises as a sea-voyage or a commercial speculation; there are even cases where a single crime might free him from what else would be a lifelong dread. And, at worst, he can fall back on the Epicurean arguments proving that neither physical pain nor death is to be feared, while the threats of divine vengeance are a baseless dream.¹

The radical selfishness of Epicureanism comes out still more distinctly in its attitude towards political activity. Not only does it systematically discourage mere personal ambition—the desire of possessing political power for the furtherance of one's own ends—but it passes a like condemnation on disinterested efforts to improve the condition of the people by legislation; while the general rule laid down for the wise man in his capacity of citizen is passive obedience to the established authorities, to be departed from only when the exigencies of self-defence require it. On this Prof. Wallace observes that 'political life, which in all ages has been impossible for those who had not wealth, and who were unwilling to mix themselves with vile and impure associates, was not to the mind of Epicurus.'² No authority is quoted to prove that the abstention recommended by Epicurus was dictated by purist sentiments of any kind; nor can we readily admit that it is impossible to record a vote, to canvass at an election, or even to address a public meeting, without fulfilling one or other of the conditions specified by Prof. Wallace; and we know by the example of Littré that it is possible for a poor man to take a rather prominent part in public life, without the slightest sacrifice of personal dignity.³ It must also be remembered that Epicurus was not speaking for

¹ Cicero, *De Fin.*, ii., 17.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 163.

³ Prof. T. H. Green may be mentioned as another example of a high-minded thinker who was also an ardent and active politician. With regard to antiquity, see the splendid roll of public-spirited philosophers enumerated by Plutarch, *Adv. Col.*, xxxii.

himself alone; he was giving practical advice to all whom it might concern—advice of which he thought, *aeque pauperibus prodest, locupletibus aequae*; so that when Prof. Wallace adds that, ‘above all, it is not the business of a philosopher to become a political partisan, and spend his life in an atmosphere of avaricious and malignant passions,’¹ I must observe that Epicureanism was not designed to make philosophers, but perfect men. The real question is whether it would serve the public interest were all who endeavour to shape their lives by the precepts of philosophy to withdraw themselves entirely from participation in the affairs of their country. And, having regard to the general character of the system now under consideration, we may not uncharitably surmise that the motive for abstention which it supplied was selfish love of ease far more than unwillingness to be mixed up with the dirty work of politics.

Epicureanism allotted a far larger place to friendship than to all the other social virtues put together; and the disciple was taught to look to it not only for the satisfaction of his altruistic impulses, but for the crowning happiness of his life. The egoistic basis of the system was, indeed, made sufficiently prominent even here; utility and pleasure, which Aristotle had excluded from the notion of true friendship, being declared its proper ends. All the conditions of a disinterested attachment were, however, brought back by a circuitous process. It was argued that the full value of friendship could not be reaped except by those whose affection for each other went to the extent of complete self-devotion; but the Epicureans were less successful in showing how this happy condition could be realised consistently with the study of his own interest by each individual. As a matter of fact, it was realised; and the members of this school became remarkable, above all others, for the tenderness and fidelity of their personal attachments. But we may suspect that formal precepts had little to do with the result. Estrangement from the popular creed, when still uncommon, has always a tendency to draw the dissidents together;² and where other ties, whether religious, domestic, or patriotic, are neglected, the ordinary instincts of human nature are likely to show themselves with all the more energy in the only remaining form of union. Moreover, the cheerful, contented, abstemious, unambitious characters who would be the most readily attracted to the Epicurean brotherhood supplied the very materials that most readily unite in

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 164.

² J. S. Mill observed, in a conversation with Mr. John Morley (now Lord Morley), reported by the latter, that ‘in his youth mere negation of religion was a firm bond of union, social and otherwise, between men who agreed in nothing else’ (*Critical Miscellanies*, p. 50). Within the experience of some it is a bond of union still (1914).

placid and enduring attachments. A tolerably strict standard of orthodoxy provided against theoretical dissensions: nor were the new converts likely to possess either daring or originality enough to excite controversies where they did not already exist.

IV

After eliminating all the sources of misery due to folly and vice, Epicurus had still to deal with what, in his opinion, were the most formidable obstacles to human happiness, dread of the divine anger and dread of death, either in itself, or as the entrance on another life. To meet these, he compiled, for we can hardly say constructed, an elaborate system of physical philosophy, having for its object to show that nature is entirely governed by mechanical causes, and that the soul perishes with the body. It has been already mentioned that for science as such and apart from its ethical applications, he neither cared nor pretended to care in the least. It seems, therefore, rather surprising that he could not manage, like the Sceptics before him, to get rid of supernaturalism by a somewhat more expeditious method. The explanation seems to be that to give some account of natural phenomena had become, in his time, a necessity for every one aspiring to found a philosophical system. A brilliant example had been set by Plato and Aristotle, of whom the former, too, had apparently yielded to the popular demand rather than followed the bent of his own genius, in turning aside from ethics to physics; and Zeno had similarly included the whole of knowledge in his teaching. The old Greek curiosity respecting the causes of things was still alive; and a similar curiosity was doubtless awakening among those populations to whom Greek civilisation had been carried by colonisation, commerce, and conquest. Now, those scientific speculations are always the most popular which can be shown to have some bearing on religious belief, either in the way of confirmation or of opposition, according as faith or doubt happens to be most in the ascendant. Eighty years ago, among ourselves, no work on natural philosophy could hope for a large circulation unless it was filled with teleological applications. At present, liberal opinions are widely diffused; and those treatises are most eagerly studied which tend to prove that everything in nature can be best explained through the agency of mechanical causation. At neither period is it the facts themselves which have excited most attention, but their possible bearing on our own interests. Among the contemporaries of Epicurus, the two currents of thought that in more recent times have enjoyed an alternate triumph, seem to have

co-existed as forces of about equal strength. The old superstitions were rejected by all thinking men ; and the only question was by what new faith they should be replaced. Poets and philosophers had alike laboured to bring about a religious reformation by exhibiting the popular mythology in its grotesque deformity, and by constructing systems in which pure monotheism was more or less distinctly proclaimed. But it suited the purpose, perhaps it gratified the vanity of Epicurus to talk as if the work of deliverance still remained to be done, as if men were still groaning under the incubus of superstitions which he alone could teach them to shake off. He seems, indeed, to have confounded the old and the new faiths under a common opprobrium, and to have assumed that the popular religion was mainly supported by Stoic arguments, or that the Stoic optimism was not less productive of superstitious terrors than the gloomy polytheism which it was designed to supersede.¹

Again, while attacking the belief in human immortality, Epicurus seems to direct his blows against the metaphysical reasonings of Plato,² as well as against the indistinct forebodings of primitive imagination. The consequences of this two-edged polemic are very remarkable. In reading Lucretius, we are surprised at the total absence of criticisms like those brought to bear on Greek mythology with such formidable effect, first by Plato and, long afterwards, by Lucian. There is a much more modern tone about his invectives, and they seem aimed at an enemy familiar to ourselves. One would suppose that the advent of Catholicism had been revealed in a prophetic vision to the poet, and that this, rather than the religion of his own times, was the object of his wrath and dread ; or else that some child of the Renaissance was seeking for a freer utterance of his own revolt against all theology, under the disguise of a dead language and of a warfare with long-discredited gods. For this reason, Christians have always regarded him, with perfect justice, as a dangerous enemy ; while rationalists of the fiercer type have accepted his splendid denunciations as the appropriate expression of their own most cherished feelings.

The explanation of this anomaly is, I think, to be found in the fact that Catholicism did, to a great extent, actually spring from a continuation of those widely different tendencies which Epicurus confounded in a common assault. It had an intellectual basis in the Platonic and Stoic philosophies, and a popular basis in the revival of those manifold superstitions which, underlying the brilliant civilisations of Greece and Rome,

¹ Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.*, i., 14-20.

² Woltjer, *Lucret. Ph.*, p. 74.

were always ready to break out with renewed violence when their restraining pressure was removed. This revival was powerfully aided from without. The same movement that was carrying Hellenic culture into Asia was bringing Oriental delusions by a sort of back current into the western world. Nor was this all. The relaxation of all political bonds, together with the indifference of the educated classes, besides allowing a rank undergrowth of popular beliefs to spring up unchecked, surrendered the regulation of those beliefs into the hands of a profession which it had hitherto been the policy of every ancient republic to keep under rigid restraint—the accredited or informal ministers of religion.¹ Now, the chief characteristic of a priestly order has always and everywhere been insatiable avarice. When forbidden to acquire wealth in their individual capacity, they grasp at it all the more eagerly in their corporate capacity. And, as the Epicureans probably perceived, there is no engine which they can use so effectually for the gratification of this passion as the belief in a future life. What they have to tell about this is often described by themselves and their supporters as a message of joy to the weary and afflicted. But under their treatment it is very far from being a consolatory belief. Dark shades and lurid lights predominate considerably in their pictures of the world beyond the grave; and here, as will presently be shown, they are aided by an irresistible instinct of human nature. On this subject, also, they can speak with unlimited confidence; for, while their other statements about the supernatural are liable to be contradicted by experience, the abode of souls is a bourne from which no traveller returns to disprove the accuracy of their statements.

That such a tendency was at work some time before the age of Epicurus is shown by the following passage from Plato's *Republic*:—

Mendicant prophets go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they have a power committed to them of making atonement for their sins or those of their fathers by sacrifices or charms. . . . And they produce a host of books . . . according to which they perform their ritual, and persuade not only individuals but whole cities, that expiations and atonements for sin may be made by sacrifices and amusements which fill a vacant hour,² and are equally at the service of the

¹ 'Das Staatsgesetz oder das dem Gesetz gleichkommende väterliche Herkommen bildet einen Gegensatz gegen ein abgeschlossenes Priesterthum und dessen natürlichen Einfluss.' Welcker, *Gr. Götterlehre*, ii., p. 45. 'La religion romaine, comme toutes celles où domine l'esprit laïque, diminue le rôle du prêtre.'—Gaston Boissier, *La Religion Romaine*, i., p. 16.

² This reminds one of the 'pèlerinages,' which figure along with 'pigeon-shooting' among the attractions offered by French country hotels to idle visitors. (Written in 1881.)

living and the dead; the latter sort they call mysteries, and they redeem us from the pains of hell, but if we neglect them no one knows what awaits us.¹

Let us now pass over fourteen centuries and see to what results the doctrine taught by Plato himself led when it had entered into an alliance with the superstitions which he denounced. The illustration shall be taken from a sainted hero of the Catholic Church. In a sermon preached before Pope Nicholas II. at Arezzo, the famous Hildebrand, afterwards Gregory VII., relates the following story:—

In one of the provinces of Germany there died, about ten years ago, a certain count, who had been rich and powerful, and, what is astonishing for one of that class, he was, according to the judgment of man, pure in faith and innocent in his life. Some time after his death, a holy man descended in spirit to hell, and beheld the count standing on the topmost rung of a ladder. He tells us that this ladder stood unconsumed amid the crackling flames around; and that it had been placed there to receive the family of the aforesaid count. There was, moreover, the black and frightful abyss out of which rose the fatal ladder. It was so ordered that the last comer took his stand at the top of the ladder, and when the rest of the family arrived he went down one step, and all below him did likewise.

As the last of the same family who died came and took his place, age after age, on this ladder, it followed inevitably that they all successively reached the depth of hell. The holy man who beheld this thing, asked the reason of this terrible damnation, and especially how it was that the seigneur whom he had known and who had lived a life of justice and well-doing should be thus punished. And he heard a voice saying, 'It is because of certain lands belonging to the church of Metz, which were taken from the blessed Stephen by one of this man's ancestors, from whom he was the tenth in descent; and for this cause all these men have sinned by the same avarice and are subjected to the same punishment in eternal fire.'²

In view of such facts as these, we cannot blame the Epicureans if they regarded the doctrine of future retribution as anything but a consolatory or ennobling belief, and if they deemed that to extirpate it was to cut out a mischievous delusion by the roots:—

¹ *Republic*, ii., 364, C, *sqq.*; Jowett's transl., iii., 234-5. Elsewhere Plato proposes that these 'bestial persons' who persuade others that the gods can be induced by magical incantations to pardon crime, should be punished by imprisonment for life (*Leg.* x., 909, A, *sq.*).

² Villemain, *Life of Gregory VII.*, Engl. transl., i., p. 305. As a further illustration of the same subject, it may be mentioned that there is a cemetery near Innsbruck (and probably many more like it throughout the Tyrol) freely adorned with rude representations of souls in purgatory, stretching out their hands for help from amid the flames. The help is of course to be obtained by purchase from the priesthood.

'Et merito : nam si certam finem esse viderent
 Aerumnarum homines aliqua ratione valerent
 Religionibus, atque minis obsistere vatam :
 Nunc ratio nulla 'st restandi, nulla facultas,
 Aeternas quoniam poenas in morte timendum.'¹

And it is no wonder that the words of their great poet should read like a prophetic exposure of the terrors with which the religious revival, based on a coalition of philosophy and superstition, was shortly to overspread the whole horizon of human life.

So strong, however, was the theological reaction against Greek rationalism that Epicurus himself came under its influence. Instead of denying the existence of the gods altogether, or leaving it uncertain like Protagoras, he asserted it in the most emphatic manner. Their interference with nature was all that he cared to dispute. The egoistic character of his whole system comes out once more in his conception of them as beings too much absorbed in their own placid enjoyments to be troubled with the work of creation and providence. He was, indeed, only repeating aloud what had long been whispered in the free-thinking circles of Athenian society. That the gods were indifferent to human interests was a heresy indignantly denounced by Aeschylus,² maintained by Aristodêmus, the friend of Socrates, and singled out as a fit subject for punishment by Plato. Nor was the theology of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* practically distinguishable from such a doctrine. Although essential to the continued existence of the cosmos, considered as a system of movements, the Prime Mover communicates the required impulse by the mere fact of his existence, and apparently without any consciousness of the effect he is producing. Active beneficence had, in truth, even less to do with the ideal of Aristotle than with the ideal of Epicurus, and each philosopher constructed a god after his own image ; the one absorbed in perpetual thought, the other, or more properly the others, in perpetual enjoyment ; for the Epicurean deities were necessarily conceived as a plurality, that they might not be without the pleasure of friendly conversation. Nevertheless, the part assigned by Aristotle to his god permitted him to offer a much stronger proof of the divine existence and attributes than was possible to Epicurus, who had nothing better to adduce than the universal belief of mankind,—an argument obviously proving too much, since it told, if anything, more

¹ And with good cause ; for if men saw that there was a fixed limit to their woes, they would be able in some way to withstand the religious scruples and threatenings of the seers. As it is there is no way, no means of resisting, since they must fear after death everlasting pains. (Lucr., i., 108-12, Munro's translation.)

² *Agamemnon*, 369 (Dindorf).

powerfully for the interference than for the bare reality of supernatural agents.

Our philosopher appears to more advantage as a critic than as a religious dogmatist. He meets the Stoic belief in Providence by pointing out the undeniable prevalence of evils which omnipotent benevolence could not be supposed to tolerate; the Stoic optimism, with its doctrine, still a popular one, that all things were created for the good of man, by a reference to the glaring defects which, on that hypothesis, would vitiate the arrangements of nature; the Stoic appeal to omens and prophecies by showing the purely accidental character of their fulfilment.¹ But he trusts most of all to a radically different explanation of the world, an explanation which everywhere substitutes mechanical causation for design. Only one among the older systems—the atomism of Democritus—had consistently carried out such a conception of nature, and this, accordingly, Epicurus adopts in its main outlines.

V

It is generally assumed by the German critics that the atomic theory was peculiarly fitted to serve as a basis for the individualistic ethics of Epicureanism. To this I cannot agree. The insignificance and powerlessness of the atoms, except when aggregated together in enormous numbers, would seem to be naturally more favourable to a system where the community went for everything and the individual for nothing; nor does the general acceptance of atomism by modern science seem to be accompanied by any relaxation of the social sentiment in its professors. Had the Stoics followed Democritus and Epicurus Heracleitus—at least a conceivable hypothesis—some equally cogent reason would doubtless have been forthcoming to indicate the appropriateness of their choice.² As it is, we have no evidence that Epicurus saw anything more in the atomic theory than a convenient explanation of the world on purely mechanical principles.

The division of matter into minute and indestructible particles served admirably to account for the gradual formation and disappearance of bodies without necessitating the help of a creator. But the infinities assumed as a condition of atomism were of even greater importance. Where time and space are unlimited, the quantity of matter must be equally unlimited,

¹ Usener, *Epicurea*, pp. 252 sq.; Laert. D., x., 98.

² Prof. Sellar observes, as I think, with perfect truth, that 'there is no necessary connexion between the atomic theory of philosophy and that view of the ends and objects of life which Lucretius derived from Epicurus.'—*Roman Poets of the Republic*, p. 348, 2nd ed.

otherwise, being composed of loose particles, it would long since have been dissipated and lost in the surrounding void. Now, given infinite time and space, and infinite atoms capable of combining with one another in various ways, all possible combinations must already have been tried, not once or twice, but infinitely often. Of such combinations, that which best fulfils the conditions of mechanical stability will last the longest, and, without being designed, will present all the characters of design. And this, according to Epicurus, is how the actual frame of things comes to be what it is. Nor was it only the world as a whole that he explained by the theory of a single happy accident occurring after a multitude of fortuitous experiments. The same process repeats itself on a smaller scale in the production of particular compounds. All sorts of living bodies were originally thrown up from the earth's bosom, but many of them instantly perished, not being provided with the means of nutrition, propagation, or self-defence. In like manner we are enabled to recall a particular thought at pleasure, because innumerable images are continually passing through the mind, none of which comes into the foreground of consciousness until attention is fixed on it; though how we come to distinguish it from the rest is not explained. So also, only those societies survived and became civilised where contracts were faithfully observed. All kinds of wild beasts have at different times been employed in war, just as horses and elephants are now, but on trial were found unmanageable and given up.¹

It will be seen that what has been singled out as an anticipation of the Darwinian theory was only one application of a very comprehensive method for eliminating design from the universe. But of what is most original and essential in Darwinism, that is, the modifiability of specific forms by the summing up of spontaneous variations in a given direction, the Epicureans had not the slightest suspicion. And wherever they or their master have, in other respects, made some approach to the truths of modern science, it may fairly be explained on their own principle as a single lucky guess out of many false guesses.

The modern doctrine of evolution, while relying largely on the fertility of multiplied chances, is not obliged to assume such an enormous number of simultaneous coincidences as Epicurus. The ascription of certain definite attractions and repulsions to the ultimate particles of matter would alone restrict their possible modes of aggregation within comparatively narrow limits. Then, again, the world seems to have been built up by successive stages, at each of which some new force or combination

¹ Lucret., i., 1020 *sqq.*; v., 835 *sqq.*; iv., 780 *sqq.*; v., 1023; v., 1307 *sqq.*

of forces came into play, a firm basis having been already secured for whatever variations they were capable of producing. Thus the solar system is a state of equilibrium resulting from the action of two very simple forces, gravitation and heat. On the surface of the earth, cohesion and chemical affinity have been superadded. When a fresh equilibrium had resulted from their joint energy, the more complex conditions of life found free scope for their exercise. The transformations of living species were similarly effected by variation on variation. And, finally, in one species, the satisfaction of its animal wants set free those more refined impulses by which, after many experiments, civilisation has been built up. Obviously the total sum of adaptations necessary to constitute our actual world will have the probabilities of its occurrence enormously increased if we suppose the more general conditions to be established prior to, and in complete independence of, the less general, instead of limiting ourselves, like the ancient atomists, to one vast simultaneous shuffle of all the material and dynamical elements involved.

Returning to Epicurus, we have next to consider how he obtained the various motions required to bring his atoms into those infinite combinations of which our world is only the most recent. The conception of matter naturally endowed with capacities for moving in all directions indifferently was known to the first Atomists, Leucippus and Democritus; but not that of mutual attraction and repulsion, except under the loose form that like things seek, while unlike things avoid, one another.¹ Democritus apparently regarded weight as an acquired property of bodies depending on the number of their component atoms and the closeness with which they were packed together. Epicurus, on the other hand, assumed it as being, like extension and resistance, an original quality of the atoms themselves, not indeed as a force attracting them towards each other, but as a force carrying them for ever downwards through infinite space. But while the atomism of Democritus was, as a theory of matter, the greatest contribution ever made to physical science by pure speculation, as a theory of motion the new atomism of Epicurus was open to at least three insuperable objections. Passing over the difficulty of a perpetual movement through space in one direction only, there remained the self-contradictory assumption that an infinite number of atoms all

¹ The notion that Democritus assumed weight as an original property of his atoms, in the sense of a tendency to fall for ever downward through infinite space, is now generally abandoned. See Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 398 (2nd ed.); Windelband *Gesch. d. ant. Phil.*, p. 126, note 4 (3rd ed.); Paul Deussen, *Phil. d. Gr.*, p. 144.

moving together in that one direction could find any unoccupied space to fall into.¹ Secondly, astronomical discoveries, establishing as they did the sphericity of the earth, had for ever disproved the crude theory that unsupported bodies fall downward in parallel straight lines. Even granting that the astronomers, in the absence of complete empirical verification, could not prove their whole contention, they could at any rate prove enough of it to destroy the notion of parallel descent; for the varying elevation of the pole-star demonstrated the curvature of the earth's surface so far as it was accessible to observation, thus showing that, within the limits of experience, gravitation acted along convergent lines. Finally, Aristotle had pointed out that the observed differences in the velocity of falling bodies were due to the atmospheric resistance, and that, consequently, they would all move at the same rate in such an absolute vacuum as atomism assumed.² Of these objections Epicurus ignored the first two, except, apparently, to the extent of refusing to believe in the antipodes.³ The third he acknowledged, and set himself to evade it by a hypothesis striking at the root of all scientific reasoning. The atoms, he tells us, suffer a slight deflection from the line of perpendicular descent, sufficient to bring them into collision with one another; and from this collision proceeds the variety of movement necessary to throw them into all sorts of accidental combinations. Our own freewill, says Lucretius, furnishes an example of such a deflection whenever we swerve aside from the direction in which an original impulse is carrying us.⁴ That the irregularity thus introduced into nature interfered with the laws of universal causation was an additional recommendation of it in the eyes of Epicurus, who hated the physical necessity of the philosophers even more than he hated the watchful interfering providence of the theologians.⁵ But, apparently, neither he nor his disciples saw that in discarding the invariable sequence of phenomena, they annulled, to the same extent, the possibility of human foresight and adaptation of means to ends. There was no reason why the deflection, having once occurred, should not be repeated infinitely often, each time producing effects of incalculable extent. And a further inconsequence of the system is that it afterwards accounts for human choice by a mechanism which has nothing to do with freewill.⁶

The Epicurean cosmology need not delay us long. It is completely independent of the atomic theory, which had only

¹ Woltjer, *Lucr. Phil.*, p. 38.

² Arist., *Phys.*, iv., 8, 216, a, 20.

³ Lucretius, 1051-1081. It is amazing how any one can read this passage and continue to believe that the Epicureans were 'the great scientific school of antiquity'—or indeed had anything to do with science at all.

⁴ ii., 257 *sqq.*

⁵ Laert. D., x. 134; Zeller, 424, note 4.

⁶ Lucret., iv., 875 *sqq.*

been introduced to explain the indestructibility of matter, and, later on, the mechanism of sensation. In describing how the world was first formed, Epicurus falls back on the old Ionian meteorology. He assumes the existence of matter in different states of diffusion, and segregates fluid from solid, light from heavy, hot from cold, by the familiar device of a rapid vortical movement.¹ For the rest, Epicurus gives an impartial welcome to the most conflicting theories of his predecessors, provided only that they dispense with the aid of supernatural intervention; as will be seen by the following summary, which I quote from Zeller:—

Possibly the world may move, and possibly it may be at rest. Possibly it may be round, or else it may be triangular, or have any other shape. Possibly the sun and the stars may be extinguished at setting, and be lighted afresh at their rising: it is, however, equally possible that they may only disappear under the earth and reappear again, or that their rising and setting is due to yet other causes. Possibly the waxing and waning of the moon may be caused by the moon's revolving; or it may be due to the atmospheric change, or to an actual increase or decrease in the moon's size, or to some other cause. Possibly the moon may shine with borrowed light, or it may shine with its own, experience supplying us with instances of bodies which give their own light, and of others which have their light borrowed. From these and such like statements it appears that questions of natural science in themselves have no value for Epicurus. Whilst granting that only one natural explanation of phenomena is generally possible, yet in any particular case it is perfectly indifferent which explanation is adopted.²

This was the creed professed by 'the great scientific school of antiquity,' and this was its way of protesting 'against the contempt of physics which prevailed' among the Stoics!

So far as he can be said to have studied science at all, the motive of Epicurus was hatred for religion far more than love for natural law. He seems, indeed, to have preserved that aversion for nature which is so characteristic of the earlier Greek Humanists. He seems to have imagined that by refusing to tie himself down to any one explanation of external phenomena, he could diminish their hold over the mind of man. For when he departs from his usual attitude of suspense and reserve, it is to declare dogmatically that the heavenly bodies are no larger than they appear to our senses, and perhaps smaller than they sometimes appear.³ The only arguments adduced on behalf

¹ Lucret., v., 437 *sqq.*

² Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2 pp. 397-8. Reichel's transl., pp. 412-3 (1st ed.).

³ Lucr., v., 565 *sqq.* Woltjer (*Lucret. Ph.*, p. 126) charges Lucretius with having misunderstood his master on this point. As the sun and moon appear larger when near the horizon than at other times, Epicurus thought that we then see them either as they really are or a little larger. This, Lucretius, according to Woltjer, took to

of this outrageous assertion were that if their superficial extension was altered by transmission; their colour would be altered to a still greater degree; and the alleged fact that flames look the same size at all distances.¹ It is evident that neither Epicurus nor Lucretius, who, as usual, transcribes him with perfect good faith, could ever have looked at one lamp-flame through another, or they would have seen that the laws of linear perspective are not suspended in the case of self-luminous bodies—a fact which does not tell much for that accurate observation supposed to have been fostered by their philosophy.² The truth is, that Epicurus disliked the oppressive notion of a sun several times larger than the earth, and was determined not to tolerate it, be the consequences to fact and logic what they might.

VI

The Epicurean philosophy of external nature was used as an instrument for destroying the uncomfortable belief in divine Providence. The Epicurean philosophy of mind was used to destroy the still more uncomfortable belief in man's immortality. As opinions then stood, the task was a comparatively easy one. In discussing Stoicism, I observed that the spiritualism of Plato and Aristotle was far before their age, and was not accepted or even understood by their countrymen for a long time to come. Moreover, Aristotle did not agree with his master in thinking that the personal eternity of the soul followed from its immateriality. The belief of the Stoics in a prolongation of individual existence until the destruction of all created things by fire, was, even in that very limited form, inconsistent with their avowed materialism, and had absolutely no influence on their practical convictions. Thus Plato's arguments were alone worth considering. For Epicurus, the whole question was virtually settled by the principle, which he held in common with the Stoics, that nothing exists but matter, its attributes, and its relations. He accepted, it is true, the duality of soul and body, agreeing, in this respect also, with the Stoics and the earlier physicists; and the familiar antithesis of flesh and spirit is a survival of his favourite phraseology;³ but this very term 'flesh' was employed to cover the assumption that the body to which he applied it differed not in substance but in composition from its animating principle. The latter, a rather complex aggregate, consists proximately of four distinct elements,

mean that their general apparent size may be a little over or under their real size. But there is independent doxographic evidence going to show that this was what Epicurus actually taught (Diels, p. 352).

¹ Zeller, p. 413.

² See, for instance, Woltjer, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

³ Zeller, p. 443, note 3.

imagined, apparently, for the purpose of explaining its various functions, and, in the last analysis, of very fine and mobile atoms.¹ When so much had been granted, it naturally followed that the soul was only held together by the body, and was immediately dissolved on being separated from it—a conclusion still further strengthened by the manifest dependence of psychic on corporeal activities throughout the period of their joint existence. Thus all terrors arising from the apprehension of future torments were summarily dispelled.

The simple dread of death, considered as a final annihilation of our existence, remained to be dealt with. There was no part of his philosophy on which Epicurus laid so much stress; he regarded it as setting the seal on those convictions, a firm grasp of which was essential to the security of human happiness. Nothing else seemed difficult, if once the worst enemy of our tranquillity had been overcome. His argument is summed up in the concise formula: when we are, death is not; when death is, we are not; therefore death is nothing to us.² The pleasures of life will be no loss, for we shall not feel the want of them. The sorrow of our dearest friends will be indifferent to us in the absence of all consciousness whatever. To the consideration that, however calmly we may face our own annihilation, the loss of those whom we love remains as terrible as ever, Lucretius replies that we need not mourn for them, since they do not feel any pain at their own extinction.³

There must, one would suppose, be some force in the Epicurean philosophy of death, for it has been endorsed by no less a thinker and observer than Shakespeare. To make the great dramatist responsible for every opinion uttered by one or other of his characters would, of course, be absurd; but when we find personages so different in other respects as Claudio, Hamlet, and Macbeth, agreeing in the sentiment that, apart from the prospect of a future judgment, there is nothing to appall us in the thought of death, we cannot avoid the inference that he is here making them the mouthpiece of his own convictions, even, as in Hamlet's famous soliloquy, at the expense of every dramatic propriety. Nevertheless, the answer of humanity to such sophisms will always be that of Homer's Achilles, 'μη δὴ μοι θάνατόν γε παραύδα'—'Talk me not fair of death!' A very simple process of reasoning will make this clear. The love of life necessarily involves a constant use of precautions against its loss. The certainty of death means the certainty that these precautions shall one day prove unavailing; the consciousness of its near approach means the consciousness that they have actually failed. In both cases the result must be a sense of baffled or arrested effort, more or less feeble when it

¹ Zeller, pp. 417-8.

² Laert. D., x., 125.

³ iii. 922.

is imagined, more or less acute when it is realised. But this diversion of the conscious energies from their accustomed channel, this turning back of the feelings on themselves, constitutes the essence of all emotion ; and where the object of the arrested energies was to avert a danger, it constitutes the emotion of fear. Thus, by an inevitable law, the love of life has for its reverse side the dread of death. Now the love of life is guaranteed by the survival of the fittest ; it must last as long as the human race, for without it the race could not last at all. If, as Epicurus urged, the supreme desirability of pleasure is proved by its being the universal object of pursuit among all species of animals,¹ the supreme hatefulness of death is proved by an analogous experience ; and we may be sure that, even if pessimism became the accepted faith, the darkened prospect would lead to no relaxation of our grasp on life. A similar mode of reasoning applies to the sorrow and anguish, *mortis comites et funeris atri*, from which the benevolent Roman poet would fain relieve us. For, among a social species, the instinct for preserving others is second only to the instinct of self-preservation, and frequently rises superior to it. Accordingly, the loss of those whom we love causes, and must always cause us, a double distress. There is, first, the simple pain due to the eternal loss of their society, a pain of which Lucretius takes no account. And, secondly, there is the arrest of all helpful activity on their behalf, the continual impulse to do something for them coupled with the chilling consciousness that it is too late, that nothing more can be done. So strong, indeed, is this latter feeling that it often causes the loss of those whose existence was a burden to themselves and others, to be keenly felt, if only the survivors were accustomed, as a matter of duty, to care for them and to struggle against the disease from which they suffered. Philosophy may help to fill up the blanks thus created, by directing our thoughts to objects of perennial interest, and she may legitimately discourage the affectation or the fostering of affliction ; but the blanks themselves she cannot explain away, without forfeiting all claim on our allegiance as the ultimate and incorruptible arbitress of truth.

We are now in a position to understand how far Epicurus was justified in regarding the expectation of immortality as a source of dread rather than of consolation. In this respect also, the survival of the fittest has determined that human nature shall not look forward with satisfaction to the termination of its earthly existence. Were any race of men once persuaded that death is the passage to a happier world, it would speedily be replaced by competitors holding a belief better adapted to the conditions of terrestrial duration. Hence,

¹ Cicero, *De Fin.*, i., 9.

practically speaking, the effect of religious dogmas has been to make death rather more dreaded than it would have been without their aid; and, as already observed, their natural tendency has been powerfully stimulated by the cupidity of their professional expositors. The hope of heaven, to exist at all, must be checked by a considerably stronger apprehension of hell. There is a saying in America that the immortality of the soul is too good to be true. One may suspect that the immortality in which most religious Americans still believe hardly deserves such a compliment; but it accurately expresses the incredulity with which a genuine message of salvation would be received by most men; and this explains why Universalism, with the few who have accepted it, is but the transition stage to a total rejection of any life beyond the grave. No doubt, in the first flush of fanaticism, the assurance of an easy admission to paradise may do much to win acceptance for the religion which offers it; but when such a religion ceases to make new conquests, its followers must either modify their convictions, or die out under the competition of others by whom mortal life is not held so cheap.

I must add, that while Epicurus was right in regarding the beliefs entertained about a future life as a source of painful anxiety, he was only justified in this opinion by the deeper truth, which he ignored, that they are simply the natural dread of death under another form.¹ The most appalling pictures of damnation would, taken by themselves, probably add but little to human misery. The alarming effect even of earthly punishments is found to depend on their certainty much more than on their severity; and the certainty of suffering what nobody has ever experienced must be small indeed. Besides, the class most interested in enlarging on the dark side of immortality are also interested in showing that its dangers may be bought off at a comparatively trifling cost. What Epicurus said about the inexorable fate of the physicists might here be turned against himself. He removed terrors which there was a possibility of exorcising, and substituted a prospect of annihilation whence there was no escape.²

It is, after all, very questionable whether human happiness would be increased by suppressing the thought of death as something to be feared. George Eliot, in her *Legend of Fubal*, certainly expresses the contrary opinion.³ The finest edge of

¹ 'Aequè enim timent ne apud inferos sint, quam ne nusquam.'—Seneca, *Epp.*, lxxxii., 16.

² Cp. Plutarch, *Non posse suaviter vivi*, cap. xxvii.

³ Among other feelings consequent on the first experience of death among the posterity of Cain, the following are specified:—

'It seemed the light was never loved before,
Now each man said, "'Twill go and come no more.'

enjoyment would be taken off if we forgot its essentially transitory character. The free man may, in Spinoza's words, think of nothing less than of death; but he cannot prevent the sunken shadow from throwing all his thoughts of life into higher and more luminous relief. The ideal enjoyment afforded by literature would lose much of its zest were we to discard all sympathy with the fears and sorrows on which our mortal condition has enabled it so largely to draw—the *lacrimae rerum*, which Lucretius himself has turned to such admirable account. And the whole treasure of happiness due to mutual affection must gain by our remembrance that the time granted for its exercise is always limited, and may at any moment be brought to an end—or rather, such an effect might be looked for were this remembrance more constantly present to our minds.

Lucretius dwells much on the dread of death as a source of vice and crime. He tells us that men plunge into all sorts of mad distractions or unscrupulous schemes of avarice and ambition in their anxiety to escape either from its haunting presence, or from the poverty and disrepute which they have learned to associate with it.¹ Critics are disposed to think that the poet, in his anxiety to make a point, is putting a wrong interpretation on the facts. Yet it should be remembered that Lucretius was a profound observer, and that his teaching, in this respect, may be heard repeated from London pulpits at the present day.² The truth seems to be, not that he went too far, but that he did not go far enough. What he decries as a spur to vicious energy is, in reality, a spur to all energy. Every passion, good or bad, is compressed and intensified by the contracting limits of mortality; and the thought of death impels men either to wring the last drop of enjoyment from their lives, or to take refuge from their perishing individualities in the relative endurance of collective enterprises and impersonal aims.

Let none suppose that the foregoing remarks are meant either to express any sympathy with a cowardly shrinking from death, or to intimate that the doctrine of evolution tends to reverse the noblest lessons of ancient wisdom. In holding that death is rightly regarded as an evil, and that it must always continue to be so regarded, I do not imply that it is necessarily the greatest of all evils for any given individual.

No budding branch, no pebble from the brook,
No form, no shadow but new dearness took
From the one thought that life must have an end;
And the last parting now began to send
Diffusive dread through love and wedded bliss,
Thrilling them into finer tenderness.'

¹ iii., 59 sqq.

² Written in 1881.

It is not, as Spinoza has shown, by arguing away our emotions, but by confronting them with still stronger emotions, that they are, if necessary, to be overcome.¹ The social feelings may be trusted to conquer the instinct of self-preservation, and, by a self-acting adjustment, to work with more intensity in proportion to the strength of its resistance. The dearer our lives are to us, the greater will be the glory of renouncing them, that others may be better secured in the enjoyment of theirs. Aristotle is much truer, as well as more human, than Epicurus, when he observes that 'the more completely virtuous and happy a man is, the more will he be grieved to die; for to such a one life is worth most, and he will consciously be renouncing the greatest goods, and that is grievous. Nevertheless, he remains brave, nay, even the braver for that very reason, because he prefers the glory of a warrior to every other good.'² Nor need we fear that a race of cowards will be the fittest to survive, when we remember what an advantage that state has in the struggle for existence, the lives of whose citizens are most unrestrictedly held at its disposal. But their devotion would be without merit and without meaning, were not the loss of existence felt to be an evil, and its prolongation cherished as a gain.

VII

Next to its bearing on the question of immortality, the Epicurean psychology is most interesting as a contribution to the theory of cognition. Epicurus holds that all our knowledge is derived from experience, and all our experience, directly or indirectly, from the presentations of sense. So far he says no more than would be admitted by the Stoics, by Aristotle, and indeed by every Greek philosopher except Plato. There is, therefore, no necessary connexion between his views in this respect and his theory of ethics, since others had combined the same views with a very different standard of action. It is in discussing the vexed question of what constitutes the ultimate criterion of truth that he shows to most disadvantage in comparison with the more intellectual schools. He seems to have considered that sensation supplies not only the matter but the form of knowledge; or rather, he seems to have missed the distinction between matter and form altogether. What the senses tell us, he says, is always true, although we may draw erroneous

¹ *Ethic.*, Pars iv., Prop. 7.

² *Eth. Nic.*, iii., 12., 1117, b, 10 *sqq.* Sir Alexander Grant, in his note on the passage, appositely compares the character of Wordsworth's Happy Warrior, who is 'More brave for this that he has much to love.'

inferences from their statements.¹ But this only amounts to the identical proposition that we feel what we feel ; for it cannot be pretended that the order of our sensations invariably corresponds to the actual order of things in themselves. Even confining ourselves to individual sensations, or single groups of sensations, there are some that do not always correspond to the same objective reality, and others that do not correspond to any reality at all ; while, conversely, the same object produces a multitude of different sensations according to the subjective conditions under which it affects us. To escape from this difficulty, Epicurus has recourse to a singularly crude theory of perception, borrowed from Empedocles and the older atomists. What we are conscious of is, in each instance, not the object itself, but an image composed of fine atoms thrown off from the surfaces of bodies and brought into contact with the organs of sense. Our perception corresponds accurately to an external image, but the image itself is often very unlike the object whence it originally proceeded. Sometimes it suffers a considerable change in travelling through the atmosphere. For instance, when a square tower, seen at a great distance, produces the impression of roundness, this is because the sharp angles of its image have been rubbed off on the way to our eyes. Sometimes the image continues to wander about after its original has ceased to exist, and that is why the dead seem to revisit us in our dreams. And sometimes the images of different objects coalesce as they are floating about, thus producing the appearance of impossible monsters, such as centaurs and chimaeras.²

It was with the help of this theory that Epicurus explained and defended the current belief in the existence of gods. The divine inhabitants of the *intermundia*, or empty spaces separating world from world, are, like all other beings, composed of atoms, and are continually throwing off fine images, some of which make their way unaltered to our earth and reveal themselves to the senses, particularly during sleep, when we are most alive to the subtlest impressions on our perceptive organs. With the usual irrationality of a theologian, Epicurus remained blind to the fact that gods who were constantly throwing off even the very thinnest films could not possibly survive through all eternity. Neither did he explain how images larger than the pupil of the eye could pass through its aperture while preserving their original proportions unaltered.

We have seen how Epicurus erected the senses into ultimate arbiters of truth. By so doing, however, he only pushed the old difficulty a step further back. Granting that our perceptions

¹ For the authorities, see Zeller, p. 388.

² Lucret., iv., 354, 728, 761.

faithfully correspond to certain external images, how can we be sure that these images are themselves copies of a solid and permanent reality? And how are we to determine the validity of general notions representing not some single object but entire classes of objects? The second question may be most conveniently answered first. Epicurus holds that perception is only a finer sort of sensation. General notions are material images of a very delicate texture formed, apparently, on the principle of composition-photographs by the coalescence of many individual images thrown off from objects possessing a greater or less degree of resemblance to one another.¹ Thought is produced by the contact of such images with the soul, itself, it will be remembered, a material substance.

The rules for distinguishing between truth and falsehood are given in the famous Epicurean Canon. On receiving an image into the mind, we associate it with similar images formerly impressed on us by some real object. If the association or anticipation (*πρόληψις*) is confirmed or not contradicted by subsequent experience, it is true; false, if contradicted or not confirmed.² The stress laid on absence of contradictory evidence illustrates the great part played by such notions as possibility, negation, and freedom in the Epicurean system. In ethics this class of conceptions is represented by painlessness, conceived first as the condition, and finally as the essence of happiness; in physics by the infinite void, the *inane profundum* of which Lucretius speaks with almost religious unction; and in logic by the absence of contradiction considered as a proof of reality. Here, perhaps, we may detect the Parmenidean absolute under a new form; only, by a curious reversal, what Parmenides himself strove altogether to expel from thought has become its supreme object and content.³

No satisfactory system of philosophy could be based on such haphazard methods as these. But it was peculiarly unfortunate to take the evidence of the senses as a valid foundation for conceptions so remote from it as atomism and an infinitely void space. In reality the justification for these and all other postulates of the system was purely pragmatic. It came from the will *not* to believe in religion, or rather to believe anything by which religion could be superseded.

The Epicurean philosophy of life and mind is completed by a sketch of human progress from its earliest beginnings to the complete establishment of civilisation. Here our principal

¹ Such at least seems to be the theory rather obscurely set forth in Laert. D., x., 32.

² Laert. D., x., 33 *sqq.*; Sextus Emp., *Adv. Math.*, vii., 211-16; Zeller, p. 391.

³ For additional authorities see Zeller, pp. 385-95, and Wallace's *Epicureanism*, chap. x.

authority is Lucretius; and no part of his great poem has attracted so much attention and admiration in recent times as that in which he so vividly places before us the condition of primitive men with all its miseries, and the slow steps whereby family life, civil society, religion, industry, and science arose out of the original chaos and war of all against each. But it seems likely that here, as elsewhere, Lucretius did no more than copy and colour the outlines already traced by his master's hand.¹ How far Epicurus himself is to be credited with this brilliant forecast of modern researches into the history of civilisation, is a more difficult question. When we consider that the most important parts of his philosophy were compiled from older systems, and that the additions made by himself do not indicate any great capacity for original research, we are forced to conclude that, here also, he is indebted to some authority whose name has not been preserved. The development of civilisation out of barbarism seems, indeed, to have been a standing doctrine of Greek Humanism, just as the opposite doctrine of degeneracy was characteristic of the naturalistic school. It is implied in the discourse of Protagoras reported by Plato, and also, although less fully, in the introduction to the History of Thucydides. Plato and Aristotle trace back the intellectual and social progress of mankind to very rude beginnings; while both writers assume that it was effected without any supernatural aid—a point marked to the exclusive credit of Epicurus by Guyau.² The old notion of a golden age, accepted as it was by so powerful a school as Stoicism, must have been the chief obstacle to a belief in progress; but the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, with its vivid picture of the miseries suffered by primitive men through their ignorance of the useful arts, shows that a truer conception had already gained ground quite independently of philosophic theories. That the primitive state was one of lawless violence was declared by another dramatic poet, Critias, who has also much to say about the civilising function of religion;³ and shortly before the time of Epicurus the same view was put forward by Euphoriion, in a passage of which, as it will probably be new to many readers, I subjoin a translation:—

There was a time when mortals lived like brutes
In caves and unsunned hollows of the earth,
For neither house nor city flanked with towers
Had then been reared : no ploughshare cut the clod
To make it yield a bounteous harvest, nor
Were the vines ranked and trimmed with pruning knives

¹ See Woltjer, *Lucr. Ph.*, p. 141 *sqq.*

² *Morale d'Épiqueure*, p. 157.

³ In a fragment quoted by Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.*, ix., 54.

But fruitless births the sterile earth did bear.
 Men on each other fed with mutual slaughter,
 For Law was feeble, Violence enthroned,
 And to the strong the weaker fell a prey.
 But soon as Time that bears and nurtures all
 Wrought out another change in human life,—
 Whether some rapt Promethean utterance,
 Or strong Necessity, or Nature's teaching
 Through long experience, their deliverance brought,—
 Holy Dêmêter's fruit it gave them ; the sweet spring
 Of Bacchus they discovered, and the earth,
 Unsown before, was ploughed with oxen ; cities then
 They girt with towers, and sheltering houses raised,
 And turned their savage life to civil ways ;
 And after that Law bade entomb the dead
 And measure out to each his share of dust,
 Nor leave unburied and exposed to sight
 Ghastly reminders of their former feasts.¹

The merit of having worked up these loose materials into a connected sketch was, no doubt, considerable ; but, according to Zeller, there is reason for attributing it to Theophrastus or even to Democritus rather than to Epicurus.² On the other hand, the purely mechanical manner in which Lucretius supposes every invention to have been suggested by some accidental occurrence or natural phenomenon, is quite in the style of Epicurus, and reminds us of the method by which he is known to have explained every operation of the human mind.³

VIII

Repeated references have already been made to the only man of genius whom Epicureanism ever counted among its disciples. It is time to determine with more precision the actual relation in which he stood to the master whom, with a touching survival of religious sentiment, he revered as a saviour and a god.

Lucretius has been called Rome's only great speculative genius. This is, of course, absurd. A talent for lucid exposition does not constitute speculative genius, especially when it is unaccompanied by any ability to criticise the opinions expounded. The author of the *De Rerum Naturâ* probably had a lawyer's education. He certainly exhibits great forensic skill in speaking from his brief. But Cicero and Seneca showed the same skill on a much more extensive scale ; and Cicero in particular was immensely superior to Lucretius in knowledge and argumentative power. Besides, the poet, who was certainly not disposed to hide his light under a bushel, and who exalts his own artistic

¹ *Fragmenta Tragicorum*, Didot., p. 140.

² See the whole concluding portion of *Lucr.*, bk. v.

³ Zeller, p. 416, note 1.

excellences in no measured terms, never professes to be anything but a humble interpreter of truths first revealed to his Greek instructor's vivid intellect. 'It has, indeed, been claimed for Lucretius that he teaches a higher wisdom than his acknowledged guide.¹ This assertion is, however, not borne out by a careful comparison between the two.² In both there is the same theory of the universe, of man, and of the relations connecting them with one another. The idea of nature in Lucretius shows no advance over the same idea in Epicurus. To each it expresses, not, as with the Stoics, a unifying power, a design by which all things work together for the best, but simply the conditions of a permanent mechanical aggregation. When Lucretius speaks of *foedera Naturai*, he means, not what we understand by laws of nature, that is, uniformities of causation underlying all phenomenal differences, to understand which is an exaltation of human dignity through the added power of prevision and control which it bestows, but rather the limiting possibilities of existence, the barriers against which human hopes and aspirations dash themselves in vain—an objective logic which guards us against fallacies instead of enabling us to arrive at positive conclusions. We have here the pervadingly negative character of Epicureanism, though probably presented with something of Roman solemnity and sternness. The idea of individuality, with which Lucretius has also been credited, occupies but a small place in his exposition, and seems to have interested him only as a particular aspect of the atomic theory. The ultimate particles of matter must be divided into unlike groups of units, for otherwise we could not explain the unlikenesses exhibited by sensible objects. This is neither the original Greek idea, that every man has his own life to lead, irrespective of public opinion or arbitrary convention; nor is it the modern delight in nature's inexhaustible variety as opposed to the poverty of human invention, or to the restrictions of fashionable taste. Nor can it be admitted that Lucretius developed Epicurean philosophy in the direction of increased attention to the external world. The poet was, no doubt, a consummate observer, and he used his observations with wonderful felicity for the elucidation and enforcement of his philosophical reasoning; but in this respect he has been equalled or surpassed by other poets who either knew nothing of systematic philosophy, or, like Dante, were educated in a system as unlike as possible to that of Epicurus. There is, therefore, every reason for assuming that he saw and described phenomena not by virtue of his scientific training, but by virtue of his artistic

¹ Chiefly by Ritter, *Gesch. d. Phil.*, iv., p. 94, on which see the clear and convincing reply of Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 547.

² For details see the masterly treatise of Dr. Woltjer, already cited more than once in the course of this chapter.

endowment. And the same may be said of the other points in which he is credited with improvements on his master's doctrine. There is, no doubt, a strong consciousness of unity, of individuality, and of law running through his poem. But it is under the form of intuitions or contemplations, not under the form of speculative ideas that they are to be found. And, as will be presently shown, it is not as attributes of nature but as attributes of life that they present themselves to his imagination.

In ethics, the dependence of Lucretius on his master is not less close than in physics. There is the same inconsistent presentation of pleasure conceived under its intensest aspect, and then of mere relief from pain, as the highest good;¹ the same dissuasion from sensuality, not as in itself degrading, but as involving disagreeable consequences;² the same inculcation of frugal and simple living as a source of happiness; the same association of justice with the dread of detection and punishment;³ the same preference—particularly surprising in a Roman—of quiet obedience to political power;⁴ finally, the same rejection, for the same reason, of divine providence and of human immortality, along with the same attempt to prove that death is a matter of indifference to us, enforced with greater passion and wealth of illustration, but with no real addition to the philosophy of the subject.⁵

Nevertheless, after all has been said, we are conscious of a great change in passing from the Greek moralist to the Roman poet. We seem to be breathing a new atmosphere, to find the old ideas informed with an unwonted life, to feel ourselves in the presence of one who has a power of stamping his convictions on us not ordinarily possessed by the mere imitative disciple. The explanation of this difference, I think, lies in the fact that Lucretius has so manipulated the Epicurean doctrines as to convert them from a system into a picture; and that he has saturated this picture with an emotional tone entirely wanting to the spirit of Epicureanism as it was originally designed. It is with the latter element that we may most conveniently begin.

¹ Cp. ii., 18, with ii., 172.

² The single exception to this rule that can be quoted is, I believe, the argument against impassioned love derived from its enslaving influence (*quod alterius sub nutu degitur aetas*, v., 1116). But to live under another's nod is a condition eminently unfavourable to the mental tranquillity which an Epicurean prized before all things; nor, in any case, does it seem to have counted for so much with Lucretius as the 'damnation of expenses,' which was no less formidable a deterrent to him than to the 'unco guid' of Burns's satire.

³ v., 1153-4.

⁴ v., 1126 sq.

⁵ Ziegler (*Eth. d. Gr. u. Römer*, p. 203) quotes Lucret., iii., 146 to prove that the poet recognised the existence of mental pleasures as such. But Lucretius only says that the mind has pleasures not derived from an immediate external stimulus. This would apply perfectly to the imagination of sensual pleasure.

Attention has already been called to the fact that Epicurus, although himself indifferent to physical science, was obliged, by the demands of the age, to give it a place, and a very large place, in his philosophy. Now it was to this very side of Epicureanism that the fresh intellect of Rome most eagerly attached itself. It is a great mistake to suppose that the Romans, or rather the ancient Italians, were indifferent to speculations about the nature of things. No one has given more eloquent expression to the enthusiasm excited by such enquiries than Vergil. Seneca devoted a volume to physical questions, and regretted that worldly distractions should prevent them from being studied with the assiduity they deserved. The elder Pliny lost his life in observing the eruption of Vesuvius. It was probably the imperial despotism, with its repeated persecutions of the 'Mathematicians,' which alone prevented Italy from entering on the great scientific career for which she was destined in after ages. At any rate, a spirit of active curiosity was displaying itself during the last days of the republic, and we are told that nearly all the Roman Epicureans applied themselves particularly to the physical side of their master's doctrine.¹ Most of all was Lucretius distinguished by a veritable passion for science, which haunted him even in his dreams.² Hence, while Epicurus regarded the knowledge of nature simply as a means for overthrowing religion, with his disciple the speculative interest seems to precede every other consideration, and religion is only introduced afterwards as an obstacle to be removed from the enquirer's path. How far his natural genius might have carried the poet in this direction, had he fallen into better hands, we cannot tell. As it was, the gift of what seemed a complete and infallible interpretation of physical phenomena relieved him from the necessity of independent investigation, and induced him to accept the most preposterous conclusions as demonstrated truths. But we can see how he is drawn by an elective affinity to that early Greek thought whence Epicurus derived whatever was of any real value in his philosophy.

It has been doubted, I think with insufficient reason, that Lucretius was acquainted at first hand with Empedocles.³ But, by whatever channel it reached him, the enthusiasm of Empedocles and the Eleates lives in his verse no less truly than the inspiration of Aeolian music in the song of his younger contemporary, Catullus. The atomic theory, with its wonderful revelations of invisible activity and unbroken continuity underlying the abrupt revolutions of phenomenal existence, had been the direct product of those earliest struggles towards a deeper vision into the mysteries of cosmic life; and so Lucretius was enabled through

¹ Woltjer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

² iv. 966.

³ Woltjer, *op. cit.*, pp. 178 *sqq.*

his grasp of the theory itself to recover the very spirit and passion from which it sprang.¹

But the enthusiasm for science, however noble in itself, would not alone have sufficed to mould the Epicurean philosophy into a true work of art. The *De Rerum Naturâ* is the greatest of all didactic poems, because it is something more than didactic. Far more truly than any of its Latin successors, it may claim comparison with the epic and dramatic masterpieces of Greece and Christian Europe; and that too not by virtue of any detached passages, however splendid, but by virtue of its composition as a whole. The explanation of this extraordinary success is to be sought in the circumstance that the central interest whence Lucretius works out in all directions is vital rather than merely scientific. The true heroine of his epic is not nature but universal life—human life in the first instance, then the life of all the lower animals, and even of plants as well. Not only does he bring before us every stage of man's existence from its first to its last hour with a comprehensiveness, a fidelity, and a daring unparalleled in literature; but he exhibits with equal power of portrayal the towered elephants carrying confusion into the ranks of war, or girdling their own native India with a rampart of ivory tusks; the horse with an eagerness for the race that outruns even the impulse of his own swift limbs, or fiercely neighing with distended nostrils on the battlefield; the dog snuffing an imaginary scent, or barking at strange faces in his dreams; the cow sorrowing after her lost heifer; the placid and laborious ox; the flock of pasturing sheep seen far off, like a white spot on some green hill; the tremulous kids and sportive lambs; the new-fledged birds filling all the grove with their fresh songs; the dove with her neck-feathers shifting from ruby-red to sky-blue and emerald-green; the rookery clamouring for wind or rain; the sea birds screaming over the salt waves in search of prey; the snake sloughing its skin; the scaly fishes cleaving their way through the yielding stream; the bee winging its flight from flower to flower; the gnat whose light touch on our faces passes unperceived; the grass refreshed with dew; the trees bursting into sudden life from the young earth, or growing, flourishing, and covering themselves with fruit, dependent, like animals, on heat and moisture for their increase, and glad like them:—all these helping to illustrate with unequalled variety, movement, and picturesqueness the central idea which Lucretius carries always in his mind.

The keynote of the whole poem is struck in its opening lines. When Venus is addressed as nature's sole guide and ruler, this,

¹ There is an unquestionable coincidence between Lucretius, ii., 69 *sqq.* and Plato, *Legg.*, 776 B, pointed out by Teichmüller, *Geschichte der Begriffe*, p. 177. Both may have drawn from some older source.

from the poet's own point of view, is not true of nature as a whole, but it is eminently true of life, whether we identify Venus with the passion through which living things are continually regenerated, or with the pleasure which is their perpetual motive and their only good. And it is equally appropriate, equally characteristic of a consummate artist, that the interest of the work should culminate in a description of this same passion, no longer as the source of life, but as its last outcome and full flower, yet also, when pushed to excess, the illusion by which it is most utterly disappointed and undone; and that the whole should conclude with a description of death, not as exemplified in any individual tragedy, but in such havoc as was wrought by the famous plague at Athens on man and beast alike. Again, it is by the orderly sequence of vital phenomena that Lucretius proves his first great principle, the everlasting duration and changelessness of matter. If something can come out of nothing, he asks us, why is the production of all living things attached to certain conditions of place and season and parentage, according to their several kinds? Or if a decrease in the total sum of existence be possible, whence comes the inexhaustible supply of materials needed for the continual regeneration, growth, and nourishment of animal life? It is because our senses cannot detect the particles of matter by whose withdrawal visible objects gradually waste away that the existence of extremely minute atoms is assumed; and, so far, there is also a reference to inorganic bodies; but the porosity of matter is proved by the interstitial absorption of food and the searching penetration of cold; while the necessity of a vacuum is established by the ability of fish to move through the opposing stream. The generic differences supposed to exist among the atoms are inferred from the distinctions separating not only one animal species from another, but each individual from all others of the same species. The deflection of the atoms from the line of perpendicular descent is established by the existence of human freewill. So also, the analysis which distinguishes three determinate elements in the composition of the soul finds its justification in the diverse characters of animals—the fierceness of the lion, the placidity of the ox, and the timorousness of the deer—qualities arising from the preponderance of a fiery, an ærial, and a windy ingredient in the animating principle of each respectively. Finally, by another organic illustration, the atoms in general are spoken of as *semina rerum*—seeds of things.

At the same time Lucretius is resolved that no false analogy shall obscure the distinction between life and the conditions of life. It is for attempting, as he supposes, to efface this distinction that he so sharply criticises the earlier Greek thinkers. He scoffs at Heracleitus for imagining that all forms of existence

can be deduced from the single element of fire. The idea of evolution and transformation seems, under some of its aspects, utterly alien to our poet. His intimacy with the world of living forms had accustomed him to view nature as a vast assemblage of fixed types which might be broken up and reconstructed, but which by no possibility could pass into one another. Yet this rigid retention of characteristic differences in form permits a certain play and variety of movement, an individual spontaneity for which no law can be prescribed. The *foedera Naturai*, as Prof. Sellar aptly observes, are opposed to the *foedera fati*.¹ And

¹ I think, however, that Prof. Sellar attributes more importance to this element in the Lucretian philosophy than it will bear. His words are: 'The doctrine proclaimed by Lucretius was, that creation was no result of a capricious or benevolent exercise of power, but of certain processes extending through infinite time, by means of which the atoms have at length been able to combine and work together in accordance with their ultimate conditions. The conception of these ultimate conditions and of their relations to one another involves some more vital agency than that of blind chance or an iron fatalism. The *foedera Naturai* are opposed to the *foedera fati*. The idea of law in Nature as understood by Lucretius is not merely that of invariable sequence or concomitance of phenomena. It implies at least the further idea of a "*secreta facultas*" in the original elements.' (*Roman Poets of the Republic*, p. 335, 2nd ed.) The expression *secreta facultas* occurs, I believe, only once in the whole poem (i., 174), and is used on that single occasion without any reference to the atoms, which do not appear until a later stage of the exposition. Lucretius is proving that whatever begins to exist must have a cause, and in support of this principle he appeals to the fixed laws which govern the growth of plants. Each plant springs from a particular kind of seed, and so, he argues, each seed must have a distinct or specific virtue of its own, which virtue he expresses by the words *secreta facultas*. But, according to his subsequent teaching, this specific virtue depends on a particular combination of the atoms, not on any spontaneous power which they possess of grouping themselves together so as to form organic compounds. With regard to the properties of the atoms themselves, Lucretius enumerates them clearly enough. They are extension, figure, resistance, and motion; the last mentioned being divided into downward gravitation, lateral deflection, and the momenta produced by mutual impact. Here we have nothing more than the two elements of 'iron fatalism' and 'blind chance' which Prof. Sellar regards as insufficient to account for the Lucretian scheme of creation; gravitation and mutual impact give the one, lateral deflection gives the other. Any faculty over and above these could only be conceived under the form of conscious impulse, or of mutual attractions and repulsions exercised by the atoms on one another. The first hypothesis is expressly rejected by the poet, who tells us (i., 1020) that the primordial elements are destitute of consciousness, and have fallen into their present places through the agency of purely mechanical causes. The second hypothesis is nowhere alluded to in the most distant manner, it is contrary to the whole spirit of Epicurean physics, it never occurred to a single thinker of antiquity, and to have conceived it at that time would have needed more than the genius of a Newton. As a last escape it may be urged that Lucretius believed in 'a sort of a something' which, like the fourth element in the soul, he was not prepared to define. But besides the utter want of evidence for such a supposition, what necessity would there have been for the infinite chances which he postulates in order to explain how the actual system of things came to be evolved, had the elements been originally endowed with the disposition to fall into such a system rather than into any other? For Prof. Sellar's 'vital agency' must mean this disposition if it means anything at all.

While on this subject I must also express my surprise to find Prof. Sellar saying of Lucretius that 'in no ancient writer' is 'the certainty and universality of law more emphatically and unmistakably expressed' (p. 334). This would, I think, be much truer of the Stoics, more especially Cleanthes, who recognised in its absolute universality that law of causation on which all other laws depend, but which Lucretius

this is just what might be expected from a philosophy based on the contemplation of life. For, while there is no capriciousness at all about the structure of animals, there is apparently a great deal of capriciousness about their actions. On the other hand, the Stoics, who derived their physics in great part from Heracleitus, came nearer than Lucretius to the standpoint of modern science. With them, as with the most advanced thinkers, now, it is the *foedera Naturai*—the uniformities of co-existence—which are liable to exception and modification, while the *foedera fati*—the laws of causation—are necessary and absolute.

In like manner, Lucretius rejects the theory that living bodies are made up of the four elements, much as he admires its author, Empedocles. It seemed to him a blind confusion of the inorganic with the organic, the complex harmonies of life needing a much more subtle explanation than was afforded by such a crude intermixture of warring principles. If the theory of Anaxagoras fares no better in his hands, it is for the converse reason. He looks on it as an attempt to carry back purely vital phenomena into the inorganic world, to read into the ultimate molecules of matter what no analysis can make them yield—that is, something with properties like those of the tissues out of which animal bodies are composed.

Thus, while the atomic theory enables Lucretius to account for the dependent and perishable nature of life, the same theory enables him to bring out by contrast its positive and distinguishing characteristics. The bulk, the flexibility, the complexity, and the sensibility of animal bodies are opposed to the extreme minuteness, the absolute hardness, the simplicity, and the unconsciousness of the primordial substances that build them up.

On passing from the ultimate elements of matter to those immense aggregates which surpass man in size and complexity as much as the atoms fall below him, but on whose energies his dependence is no less helpless and complete—the infinite worlds typified for us by this one system wherein we dwell, with its solid earthly nucleus surrounded by rolling orbs of light—Lucretius still carries with him the analogies of life; but in proportion to the magnitude and remoteness of the objects examined, his grasp seems to grow less firm and his touch less sure. In marked contrast to Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, he argues passionately against the ascription of a beneficent purpose to the constitution of the world; but his reasonings are based solely on its imperfect adaptation to the necessities of human

expressly tells us (ii., 255) is broken through by the *clinamen*. A more accurate statement of the case, I think, would be to say that the Epicurean poet believed unreservedly in uniformities of coexistence, but not, to the same extent, in uniformities of sequence; while apart from these two classes neither he nor modern science knows of any laws at all. (For a discussion of Dr. John Masson's views on the subject see note at the end of this chapter.)

existence. With equal vigour he maintains, apparently against Aristotle, that the present system has had a beginning ; against both Aristotle and Plato that, in common with all systems, it will have an end—a perfectly true conclusion, but evidently based on nothing stronger than the analogies of vital phenomena. And everywhere the subjective standpoint, making man the universal measure, is equally marked. Because our knowledge of history does not go far back, we cannot be far removed from its absolute beginning ; and the history of the human race must measure the duration of the visible world. The earth is conceived as a mother bringing forth every species of living creature from her teeming bosom ; and not only that, but a nursing mother feeding her young offspring with abundant streams of milk—an unexpected adaptation from the myth of a golden age. If we no longer witness such wonderful displays of fertility, the same elastic method is invoked to explain their cessation. The world, like other animals, is growing old and effete. The exhaustion of Italian agriculture is adduced as a sign of the world's decrepitude¹ with no less confidence than the freshness of Italian poetry as a sign of its youth.² The vast process of cosmic change, with its infinite cycles of aggregation and dissolution, does but repeat on an overwhelming scale the familiar sequences of birth and death in animal species. Even the rising and setting of the heavenly bodies and the phases of the moon may, it is argued, result from a similar succession of perishing individuals, although we take them for different appearances of a single unalterable sphere.³

A similar vein of thought runs through the moral and religious philosophy of Lucretius. If we look on him as a reformer, we shall say that his object was to free life from the delusions with which it had been disfigured by ignorance and passion. If we look on him as an artist, we shall say that he instinctively sought to represent life in the pure and perfect beauty of its naked form. If we look on him as a poet, we shall say that he exhibits all the objects of false belief no longer in the independence of their fancied reality, but in their place among other vital phenomena, and in due subordination to the human consciousness whose power, even when it is bound by them, they reveal. But while the first alternative leaves him in the position of a mere imitator or expositor who brings home no lessons that Epicurus had not already enforced with far greater success, the other two, and above all the last, restore him to the position of an original genius, who, instead of deriving his intuitions from the Epicurean system, adopts just so much of that system as is necessary to give them coherence and shape. It may, no doubt, be urged, that were life reduced to the simple

¹ ii., 1170-1.² v., 1337.³ v., 665-673 ; 730-49.

expression, the state of almost vegetative repose, demanded by Lucretius, denuded of love, of ambition, of artistic luxury, of that aspiration towards immediate or eventual reunion with some central soul of things, which all religions more or less distinctly embody, its value for imaginative purposes would be destroyed; and that the deepest lesson taught by his poem would not be how to enjoy existence with the greatest intensity, but how to abandon it with the least regret. Now it is just here that the wonderful power of poetry comes in, and does for once, under the form of a general exposition, what it has to do again and again under the easier conditions of individual presentation. For poetry is essentially tragic, and almost always excites the activity of our imagination, not by giving it the assured possession of realities, but by the strain resulting from their actual or their expected eclipse. If Homer and the Attic tragedians show us what is life, and what are the goods of life, it is less through experience of the things themselves, than through the form of the void or the outline of the shadow that their removal or obscuration has produced. So also in the universal tragedy of the Roman poet, where the actors are not persons, but ideas. Every belief is felt with more poignant intensity at the moment of its overthrow, and the world of illusion is compensated for its intellectual extinction by its imaginative persistence as a conscious creation, a memory, or a dream. Never was mythological picture so splendidly painted as those in which Lucretius has shown us Mavors pillowed on the lap of Venus, or led before us the Idaean mother in her triumphal car. No redeemer, credited with supernatural powers, has ever enjoyed such an apotheosis as that bestowed by his worshipper on the apostle of unbelief. Nowhere have the terrible and mysterious suggestions of mortality been marshalled with such effect as in the argument showing that death no more admits of experience than of escape. What love-inspired poet has ever followed with such tenderness of sympathy or such audacity of disclosure the storm and stress of passion as he to whom its objects were disrobed of their divinity, for whom its fancied satisfaction was but the kindling to insatiable effort of a fatally unquenchable desire? So far from being 'compelled to teach a truth he would not learn,' Lucretius was enabled by the spirit of his own incomparable art to seize and fix for ever, in bold reversal of light and shade, those visions on which 'the killing light of truth' had long before him already dawned.

The *De Rerum Naturâ* is the greatest of Roman poems, because it is just the one work where the abstract genius of Rome met with a subject combining an abstract form with the interest and inspiration of concrete reality; where negation works with a greater power than assertion; where the satire is

directed against follies more widespread and enduring than any others; where the teaching in some most essential points can never be superseded; and where dependence on a Greek model left the poet free to contribute from his own imagination those elements to which the poetic value of his work is entirely due. By a curious coincidence, the great poet of mediaeval Italy attained success by the employment of a somewhat similar method. Dante represented, it is true, in their victorious combination, three influences against which Lucretius waged an unrelenting warfare—religion, the idealising love of woman, and the spiritualistic philosophy of Greece. Nevertheless, they resemble each other in this important particular, that both have taken an abstract theory of the world as the mould into which the burning metal of their imaginative conceptions is poured. Dante, however, had a power of individual presentation which Lucretius either lacked or had no opportunity of exercising; and therefore he approaches nearer to that supreme creativeness which only two races, the Greek and the English, have hitherto displayed on a very extended scale.

IX

Returning once more to Epicurus, we have now to sum up the characteristic excellences and defects of his philosophy. The revival of the atomic theory showed unquestionable courage and insight. Outside the school of Democritus, it was, so far as we know, accepted by no other thinker. Plato never mentions it. Aristotle examined and rejected it. The opponents of Epicurus himself treated it as a self-evident absurdity.¹ Only Marcus Aurelius seems to have contemplated the possibility of its truth.² But while to have maintained the right theory in the face of such universal opposition was a proof of no common discernment, we must remember that appropriating the discoveries of others, even when those discoveries are in danger of being lost through neglect, is a very different thing from making discoveries for one's self. No portion of the glory due to Leucippus and Democritus should be diverted to their arrogant successor. And it must also be remembered that the Athenian philosopher, by his theory of deflection, not only spoiled the original hypothesis, but even made it a little ridiculous.

The second service of Epicurus was entirely to banish the idea of supernatural interference from the study of natural phenomena. This also was a difficult enterprise in the face of that overwhelming theological reaction begun by Socrates, continued by Plato, and carried to grotesque consequences by the Stoics; but, here again, there can be no question of attributing

¹ Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.*, i., 24.

² *Comm.*, ix., 28.

any originality to the philosopher of the Garden. That there either were no gods at all, or that if there were they never meddled with the world, was a common enough opinion in Plato's time; and even Aristotle's doctrine of a Prime Mover excludes the notion of creation, providence, and miracles altogether. On the other hand, the Epicurean theory of idle gods was irrational in itself, and kept the door open for a return of superstitious beliefs.

The next and perhaps the most important point in favour of Epicureanism is its theory of pleasure as the end of action. Plato had left his idea of the good undefined; Aristotle had defined his in such a manner as to shut out the vast majority of mankind from its pursuit; the Stoics had revolted every instinct by altogether discarding pleasure as an end, and putting a purely formal and hollow perfection in its place. It must further be admitted that Epicurus, in tracing back justice to the two ideas of interest and contract, had hold of a true and fertile principle. Nevertheless, although ethics is his strongest ground, his usual ill-luck pursues him even here. It is where he is most original that he goes most astray. By reducing pleasure, as an end of action, to the mere removal of pain, he alters earlier systems of hedonism for the worse; and plays the game of pessimism by making it appear that, on the whole, death must be preferable to life, since it is what life can never be—a state of absolute repose. And by making self-interest, in the sense of seeking nothing but one's own pleasure or the means to it, the only rule of action, he endangers the very foundations of society. At best, the selfish system, as Coleridge has beautifully observed, 'stands in a similar relation to the law of conscience or universal selfless reason, as the dial to the sun which indicates its path by intercepting its radiance.'¹ Nor is the indication so certain as Coleridge admitted. A time may come when self-sacrifice shall be unnecessary for the public welfare, but we are not within a measurable distance of it as yet.

No word of commendation can be pronounced on the Epicurean psychology and logic. They are both bad in themselves, and inconsistent with the rest of the system. Were all knowledge derived from sense-impressions—especially if those impressions were what Epicurus imagined them to be—the atomic theory could never have been discovered or even conceived, nor could an ideal of happiness have been thought out. In its theory of human progress, Epicureanism once more shows to advantage; although in denying all inventiveness to man, and making him the passive recipient of external impressions, it differs widely from

¹ Coleridge's *Friend*, Section ii., Essay 2, *sub in*.

the modern school which it is commonly supposed to have anticipated. And we may reasonably suspect that, here as elsewhere, earlier systems embodied sounder views on the same subject.

The qualities which enabled Epicurus to compete successfully with much greater thinkers than himself as the founder of a lasting sect, were practical rather than theoretical. Others before him had taught that happiness was the end of life; none, like him, had cultivated the art of happiness, and pointed out the fittest methods for attaining it. The idea of such an art was a real and important addition to the resources of civilisation. No mistake is greater than to suppose that pleasure is lost by being made an object of pursuit. To single out the most agreeable course among many alternatives, and, when once found, steadily to pursue it, is an aptitude like any other, and is capable of being brought to a high degree of perfection by assiduous attention and self-discipline.¹ No doubt the capacity for enjoyment is impaired by excessive self-consciousness, but the same is true of every other accomplishment during the earlier stages of its acquisition. It is only the beginner who is troubled by taking too much thought about his own proficiency; when practice has become a second nature, the professor of hedonism reaps his harvest of delight without wasting a thought on his own efforts, or allowing the phantom of pleasure in the abstract to allure him away from its particular and present realisation. And, granting that happiness as such can be made an object of cultivation, Epicurus was perfectly right in teaching that the removal of pain is its most essential condition, faulty as was (from a speculative point of view) his confusion of the condition with the thing itself. If the professed pleasure-seekers of modern society often fail in the business of their lives, it is from neglecting this salutary principle, especially where it takes the form of attention to the requirements of health. In assigning a high importance to friendship, he was equally well inspired. Congenial society is not only the most satisfying of enjoyments in itself, but also that which can be most easily combined with every other enjoyment. It is also true, although a truth felt rather than

¹ 'In the higher ranks of French society there are men who merit to be called professors of the art of happiness; who have analysed its ingredients with careful fingers and scrutinising eyes; who have consummated their experience of means and ends; who, like able doctors, can apply an immediate remedy to the daily difficulties of home-life; whose practice is worthy of their theory, and who prove it by maintaining in their wives' hearts and in their own a perennial never-weakening sentiment of gratitude and love.' (*French Home Life*, p. 324.) Although Mr. Marshall's observations are directly applicable to the happiness of married life only, they tend to prove that all happiness may be reduced to an art.

perceived by our philosopher, that speculative agreement, especially when speculation takes the form of dissent from received opinions, greatly increases the affection of friends for one another. And as theology is the subject on which unforced agreement seems most difficult, to eliminate its influence altogether was a valuable though purely negative contribution to unanimity of thought and feeling in the hedonistic sect.

An attempt has been made by the French critic Guyau to trace the influence of Epicurus on modern philosophy. I cannot but think the method of this able and lucid writer a thoroughly mistaken one. Assuming the recognition of self-interest as the sole or paramount instinct in human nature to be the essence of what Epicurus taught, M. Guyau, without more ado, sets down every modern thinker who agrees with him on this one point as his disciple, and then adds to the number all who hold that pleasure is the end of action ; thus making out a pretty long list of famous names among the more recent continuators of his tradition. A more extended study of ancient philosophy would have shown the critic that moralists who, in other respects, were most opposed to Epicurus, agreed with him in holding that every man naturally and necessarily makes his own interest the supreme test of right conduct ; but that with the definition of interest a wide divergence begins. The selfish systems of modern times, on the other hand, differ entirely from Epicureanism in their conception of happiness. With Hobbes, for instance, whom Guyau classes as an Epicurean, the ideal is not painlessness but power ; the desires are, according to his view, naturally infinite, and are held in check, not by philosophical precepts but by mutual restraint ; while, in deducing the special virtues, his standard is not the good of each individual, but the good of the whole—in other words, he is, to that extent, a Stoic rather than an Epicurean. La Rochefoucauld, who is offered as another example of the same tendency, was not a moralist at all ; and as a psychologist he differs essentially from Epicurus in regarding vanity as always and everywhere the great motive to virtue. Had the Athenian sage believed this he would have despaired of making men happy ; for disregard of public opinion, within the limits of personal safety, was, with him, one of the first conditions of a tranquil existence. Nor would he have been less averse from the system of Helvétius, another of his supposed disciples. The principal originality of Helvétius was to insist that the passions, instead of being discouraged—as all previous moralists, Epicurus among the number, had advised—should be deliberately stimulated by the promise of unlimited indulgence to those who have distinguished themselves by important public services. Of Spinoza nothing need be said, for Guyau admits that he was quite as much inspired by Stoic

as by Epicurean ideas. At the same time, the combination of these two ethical systems would have been much better illustrated by modern English utilitarianism, which Guyau regards as a development of Epicureanism alone. The greatest happiness of the greatest number is not an individual or self-interested, but a universal end, having, as Mill has shown, for its ultimate sanction the love of humanity as a whole, which is an essentially Stoic sentiment. It may be added that modern utilitarianism has no sympathy with the particular theory of pleasure, whether sensual or negative, adopted by Epicurus. In giving a high, or even the highest place to intellectual enjoyments, it agrees with the estimate of Plato and Aristotle to which he was so steadily opposed. And in duly appreciating the positive side of all enjoyments, it returns to the earlier hedonism from which he stood so far apart.

The distinctive features of Epicureanism have, in truth, never been copied, nor are they ever likely to be copied, by any modern system. It arose, as we have seen, from a combination of circumstances which will hardly be repeated in the future history of thought. As the heat and pressure of molten granite turn clay into slate, so also the mighty systems of Plato and Aristotle, coming into contact with the irreligious, sensual, empirical, and sceptical side of Attic thought, forced it to assume that sort of laminated texture which characterises the theoretical philosophy of Epicurus. And, at the very same moment, the disappearance of patriotism and public spirit from Athenian life allowed the older elements of Athenian character, its amiable egoism, its love of frugal gratifications, its aversion from purely speculative interests, to create a new and looser bond of social union among those who were indifferent to the vulgar objects of ambition, but whom the austerer doctrines of Stoicism had failed to attract.

NOTE ON EPICUREANISM AND NATURAL LAW

Dr. John Masson, in one of the Appendices to his interesting work entitled *Lucretius: Epicurean and Poet* (London, 1909), takes occasion to dispute Prof. Sellar's assertion (adopted by me) that in the philosophy of Lucretius, 'the *foedera naturai* are opposed to the *foedera fati*.' And he goes on to maintain against me that Epicurus is justly credited with proclaiming the reign of law (*op. cit.*, pp. 168-169).

According to Dr. Masson the *foedera naturai*, 'are never really opposed by Lucretius to the *foedera fati*.' I admit that they are not opposed in terms; but they are practically opposed to an extent fully justifying Prof. Sellar's use of the word. For the *foedera naturai* are never once mentioned as having been broken, whereas the *foedera fati* on the sole occasion when the phrase occurs in Lucretius, are mentioned only as being broken. The passage runs as follows:—

Denique si semper motus connectitur omnis,
 Et vetere exoritur semper novus ordine certo
 Nec declinando faciunt primordia motus
 Principium quoddam quod fati foedera rumpat
 Ex infinito ne causam causa sequatur;
 Libera per terras unde haec animantibus extat
 Unde est haec (inquam) fati avolsa potestas
 Per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluntas?
 (*De Rerum Natura*, ii., 251-258.)

Translated by Munro: 'If all motion is ever linked together and a new motion ever springs from another in a fixed order, and first beginnings do not by swerving make some commencement of motion to break through the decrees of fate that cause follows not cause from everlasting whence have all living creatures here on earth, whence, I ask, has been wrested from the fates the power by which we go forward whither the will leads each?' Or as Munro puts it in the note, 'to break the perpetual sequence of cause and effect.' Thus the *foedera fati* stand for two fundamental laws of nature, the law of universal causation, and the law that the ultimate atoms of which all existing things are composed fall for ever downward through infinite space with the same uniform velocity and in perpendicular straight lines. They are only associated with fate in a metaphorical way and without any reference to the predetermination of events by supernatural volitions. Where Lucretius elsewhere refers to fate, which is not often (bk. v., 110, 310, 874), it is much as we use the word, that is in the sense of an inevitable catastrophe. *Foedera naturai*, on the other hand, are not ultimate laws, but rather the fixed conditions within which composite bodies, and more particularly organic bodies, fulfil their appointed and strictly finite term of existence (i., 580; ii., 302; v., 58, 311, 922; vi., 906). The last instance is exceptional, dealing as it does with the cause of magnetism.

What breaks the *foedera fati*, the law of universal causation and the first Epicurean law of motion, is what Lucretius calls the *clinamen*, the slight occasional deflection of the falling atoms from their rectilinear descent, assumed by Epicurus in order to account for the fortuitous concourse whence the present frame of things was, in his philosophy, supposed to result. That such a breach of natural law is possible and even of everyday occurrence the Epicureans thought might be proved by the alleged fact of human and animal freewill. But obviously they did not restrict this immunity from unbroken causal sequence to men and animals. It is shared by every single atom; and when, or how often, or with what results it may come into play is an absolutely incalculable contingency. Dr. Masson, as a close student of Lucretius, ought to know this perfectly well; yet in his criticism on my criticism he absolutely ignores it. He suggests that 'perhaps Mr. Benn holds that a belief in freewill is not consistent with a belief in Laws of Nature. This would help us to understand his assertion that Epicurus did not to any extent believe in Law' (p. 170). What the implications of human (and animal) freewill—supposing it to exist—may be, or what I personally think about the question does not concern us here. What we are concerned with is the question whether uncaused atomic deflection is consistent with unbroken natural law or not. I say that it is not; and at any rate I have Lucretius on my side. Dr. Masson in the passage where he controverts me does indeed assert the contrary. I am accused of failing 'to see that Lucretius draws a sharp distinction between the world of nature, subject to law, and the human mind which is free. So far as nature—that is, the method of the world's ongoings—is concerned, without taking into account the agency of man, Lucretius holds that *causam causa sequitur*—cause does follow cause.' I may be excused for failing to see what no one but Dr. Masson has ever seen, and what in fact does not exist. Lucretius draws no

such distinction as that with which he is here credited between the world of nature and the human mind. On the contrary, as might be expected from his materialistic philosophy, he closely assimilates the two. There is spontaneity in our volitions precisely because there is spontaneity in the atoms of which our minds are composed. Incidentally one might ask, to which of the worlds, nature or mind, do horses belong? For Dr. Masson seems to forget that the poet describes these animals also as gifted with free-will (ii., 263 *sqq.*). Nor can we suppose that horses are the only animals in possession of this power. All conscious beings might be quoted with equal reason as exceptions to the law of causal sequence. I am not concerned to deny that Epicureanism recognises the existence of uninterrupted causation as a general characteristic of nature. But it recognises the same sequence as equally characteristic of rational human action. Otherwise there would be no meaning in its appeal to pleasure and pain as prevailing motives of conduct. Lucretius knew quite well that, free-will notwithstanding, horses were generally amenable to bridle and spur, and Roman soldiers to the discipline of the Roman camp. But I deny that one who admits of physical exceptions to physical causation has—what Dr. Masson ascribes to him—‘the firmest grasp of the fact of law’ (*loc. cit.*).

With regard to the *clinamen* Dr. Masson makes the remarkable statement that ‘Epicurus held that free-will, though active in the atoms is nullified when these combine in matter’ (*loc. cit.*). The grounds for this assertion will be considered later on. Meanwhile the statement is in obvious conflict with the admission of free-will in animated beings whose minds are, according to Epicurus, composed of atoms combined in bodies. There is, moreover, a striking passage where Lucretius seems to admit at least the possibility of a deflection from the perpendicular in the fall of all heavy bodies. Arguing that the deflection of atoms from the perpendicular line of descent must be imperceptibly minute, he explains the necessity of such a limitation in order to bar out the possible objection, drawn from sensible experience, that no such deflection is ever seen to occur in the fall of heavy bodies; for on that assumption if it occurred it could not be seen:—

Namque hoc in promptu manifestumque esse videmus
Pondera, quantum in sest, non posse obliqua meare
Ex supero cum praecipitant, quod cernere possis;
Sed nil omnino recta regione viai
Declinare quis est qui possit cernere sese?

(ii., 246-250.)

In Munro’s translation: ‘For this we see to be plain and evident that weights, as far as in them is, cannot travel obliquely, when they fall from above, at least so far as you can perceive; but that nothing swerves in any case from the straight course, who is there that can perceive?’

Had it been an Epicurean dogma that the atomic deflections are nullified in material combinations, it would have been quite easy for Lucretius to have offered that explanation. The subterfuge to which he has recourse suggests that in his opinion, and probably in his master’s, the *clinamen* was always going on. Absurdity for absurdity, this seems less irrational than to suppose that atomic spontaneity remained dormant through the whole period of inorganic evolution and that it suddenly reappeared as an accompaniment of conscious life. Anyhow, whatever its extension or restriction, the anomaly remains, ‘*atomos declinare sine causa*,’ as Cicero says, ‘*quo nihil turpius est physico*.’ Like the result of another celebrated lapse, the deviation was ‘a very little one’—‘*paullum nec plus quam minimum*,’ as our poet modestly pleads—but enough to entail the loss of his philosophical honour. To say that ‘Lucretius had the firmest grasp of the fact of law’ is to betray in oneself the loosest grasp of the fact of logic.

Dr. Masson further takes me to task for saying that 'when Lucretius speaks of *foedera Naturai* he means not what we understand by Laws of Nature . . . but rather the limiting possibilities of existence' (*loc. cit.*)—a phrase which he understands as meaning that 'Lucretius grasped merely the negative side of natural order'; adding that 'a less fair criticism than this could hardly be made.' This is unjustifiably strong language. I have given references above to every passage where Lucretius talks about *foedera Naturai*, and I submit that in each instance, except that relating to the cause of magnetism, it is the negative rather than the positive side of natural order that he emphasises. And in that single instance the object of his very forced hypothesis is probably to dispel the idea that the loadstone owes its virtue to supernatural agency. Dr. Masson refers to the Lucretian phrase *majestas cognita rerum* as implying the inspiration of 'something more than negative knowledge.' But does that phrase after all refer to nature? Munro's translation, 'the acknowledged grandeur of the things,' seems to show that he did not take that view, but rather interprets the words as referring to the momentous human interests concerned, namely, the great service done to mankind by Epicurus in freeing it from superstition. And the poet goes on to promise that he will teach 'by what law (*foedus*) all things are made, what necessity there is for them to continue in that law, and how impotent they are to annul the binding statutes of time' (v., 57-59, Munro's translation). I submit that to describe these statutes as 'limiting possibilities of existence,' rather than the uniformities of causation underlying all phenomena that we understand by laws of nature, is not unfair criticism.

We have now to consider what evidence Dr. Masson has to show for his assertion that, according to Epicurus, the atomic deflections are 'nullified' in lifeless material combinations—their continued activity in animated bodies being beyond a doubt. The subject is discussed in pp. 72-95 of the supplementary volume. In my opinion, there is no evidence to speak of. Nothing is quoted from Epicurus himself or from any of his followers to show that the question had even occurred to them. Dr. Masson's claim rests solely on the improbability that a force so disturbing to the order of nature as the action of uncaused deflections in the inorganic world could have been tolerated by such scientific thinkers as the Epicureans. But a mere *a priori* improbability is too weak to support so sweeping an assertion. What is more, the assumed improbability does not exist. It rests on two gratuitous postulates. One is that inorganic spontaneity would be irreconcilable with the constancy of natural laws; the other is that this 'principle was grasped as strongly by Lucretius as by any modern man of science' (p. 74). It is not saying much for the grasp of modern men of science on natural law to suggest that they believe that energy can be created by a group of material particles such as Lucretius conceived mind to be. But further, it has to be observed that 'the principle of natural law' is a rather ambiguous expression. It is sometimes used to express a tendency; as when we talk about gravitation: heavy bodies do not always fall to the centre of the earth, but they would fall if they were unsupported. In that sense the presence of spontaneity in a stone would not interfere with natural law any more than the sort of spontaneity attributed to a horse by Lucretius does, or than the exercise of human freewill does, according to Dr. Masson. In another sense a law of nature means a routine, a going on of things in their usual way; as when we say that the earth revolves on its axis in a little less than twenty-four hours. Now in this sense the course of nature might not be affected by the spontaneity of inorganic bodies to any visible extent—supposing the deflection to be infinitesimal—as Lucretius would suppose it to be—any more than by the spontaneity of men and animals. It would be affected to an infinitely greater extent by the deflections of the free atoms outside our world; and quite possibly it was as a

consequence of their disturbing action that Lucretius confidently foretold the total destruction, in one day, of the present frame of things as an event that would certainly occur some time or other, and might well occur in the lifetime of his own contemporaries. (Compare Horace's 'Si fractus illabatur orbis,' and the similar fears entertained a century later in Palestine.)

However we are to understand the constancy of natural law as held by Epicurus, it is vain to argue that his belief in it debarred him from crediting the atoms with freewill when combined in inanimate aggregates. For this would be to assume that he was a logical thinker. But Dr. Masson admits that if the atoms possess the power of declination 'it would be logical to say' that 'it does not disappear and cease to act in the whole realm of inorganic matter, and come into activity again only after a vast interval in the atoms which compose the soul' (p. 85). Why then, if Epicurus was capable of such bad logic as that, are we forbidden to suppose that he was equally capable of combining the persistency of the *clinamen* in the inorganic world with a belief in the principle of natural laws? But the question is not one of logic only. To suppose that the atoms lost their original power of deflection in stone and wood but recovered it in animals, would be as absurd as for a modern philosopher to assume that the law of conservation held good for electrons and for conscious beings but not for the heavenly bodies or for steam-engines.

Epicurus is an unfortunate client. By way of clearing his scientific reputation his advocate leaves it in a worse plight than before. We always knew that his philosophy violated the law of universal causation. We are now invited to believe that it equally negated the constancy of the ultimate properties of matter.

CHAPTER XII

THE SCEPTICS AND ECLECTICS: GREEK PHILOSOPHY IN ROME

I

THE year 156 B.C. was signalised by an important event, if not in the history of ideas, at least in the history of their diffusion. This was the despatch of an embassy from the Athenian people to the Roman Senate, consisting of three philosophers, the heads of their respective schools—Carneades the Academician, Critolaus the Peripatetic, and Diogenes the Stoic. Philosophic teaching, once proscribed at Athens, had, at the time of which I am speaking, become her chief distinction, and the most honourable profession pursued within her precincts. It was, then, as natural that an important mission should be confided to the most eminent representatives of the calling in question as that high ecclesiastics should be similarly employed by Rome in later ages, or that German university towns should send professors to represent their interests in the imperial Diet. But the same fate that befalls an established religion had befallen an established philosophy. An attempt to impose restrictions on the liberty of teaching had, indeed, been successfully resisted, and the experiment was never repeated.¹ Nevertheless, the teachers themselves lost as much in true dignity as they gained in affluence and popular estimation. In all probability, the threat of death would not have induced Socrates to undertake the task which was, apparently, accepted without compulsion and as an honourable duty by his successors. The Athenians had made an unprovoked raid on the town of Oropus; the affair had been referred to arbitration; and the aggressors had been sentenced to pay a fine of 500 talents. It was to obtain a remission of this sentence that the three Scholarchs were sent on an embassy to the Roman Senate.

If the nature of their errand was not precisely calculated to win respect for the profession of the Athenian envoys, the subsequent proceedings of one among their number proved still less likely to raise it in the estimation of those whose favour they sought to win. Hellenic culture was, at that

¹ Wallace's *Epicureanism*, p. 37.

time, rapidly gaining ground among the Roman aristocracy; Carneades, who already enjoyed an immense reputation for eloquence and ingenuity among his own countrymen, used the opportunity offered by his temporary residence in the imperial city to deliver public lectures on morality; and such was the eagerness to listen that for a time the young nobles could think and talk of nothing else. The subject chosen was justice. The first lecture recapitulated whatever had been said in praise of that virtue by Plato and Aristotle. But it was a principle of the sect to which Carneades belonged that every affirmative proposition, however strongly supported, might be denied with equal plausibility. Accordingly, his second discourse was entirely devoted to upsetting the conclusions advocated in the first. Transporting the whole question, as would seem, from a private to a public point of view, he attempted to show, from the different standards prevailing in different countries, that there was no such thing as an immutable rule of right; and also that the greatest and most successful States had profited most by unscrupulous aggressions on their weaker neighbours—his most telling illustrations being drawn from the history of the Romans themselves. Then, descending once more to private life, the sceptical lecturer expatiated on the frequency of those cases in which justice is opposed to self-interest, and the folly of sacrificing one's own advantage to that of another. 'Suppose a good man has a runaway slave or an unhealthy house to sell, will he inform the buyer of their deficiencies, or will he conceal them? In the one case he will be a fool, in the other case he will be unjust. Again, justice forbids us to take away the life or property of another. But in a shipwreck, will not the just man try to save his life at another's expense by seizing the plank of which some weaker person than himself has got hold—especially if they are alone on the sea together? If he is wise he will do so, for to act otherwise would be to sacrifice his life. So also, in flying before the enemy, will he not dispossess a wounded comrade of his horse, in order to mount and escape on it himself? Here, again, justice is incompatible with self-preservation—that is to say, with wisdom!'¹

At the time when Carneades delivered his lectures, the morality of Rome resembled that of Sparta during her great conflict with Athens, as characterised by one of the speakers in the Melian Dialogue. Scrupulously honourable in their dealings with one another, in their dealings with foreign nations her citizens notoriously identified justice with what was agreeable or advantageous to themselves. The arguments of the Academic philosopher must, therefore, have been doubly

¹ Cicero, *De Rep.*, iii., 6-20.

annoying to the leaders of the State, as a satire on its public policy and as a source of danger to the integrity of its private life. In this respect, old Cato was a type of the whole race. In all transactions with his fellow-citizens, and in every office undertaken on behalf of the community, his honesty was such that it became proverbial. But his absolute disregard of international justice has become equally proverbial through the famous advice, reiterated on every possible occasion, that an unoffending and unwarlike city should be destroyed, lest its existence should at some future time become a source of uneasiness to the mistress of the world. Perhaps it was a secret consciousness of his own inconsistency which prevented him from directly proposing that Carneades should not be allowed to continue his lectures. At any rate, the ex-Censor contented himself with moving that the business on which the Athenian envoys had come should be at once concluded, that they might return to their classes at Athens, leaving the youth of Rome to seek instruction as before from the wise conversation and example of her public men.¹ We are not told whether his speech on this occasion wound up with the usual formula, *caeterum, Patres Conscripti, sententia mea est Carthaginem esse delendam*; but as it is stated that from the year 175 to the end of his life, he never made a motion in the Senate that was not terminated by those words, we are entitled to assume that he did not omit them in the present instance. If so, the effect must have been singularly grotesque; although, perhaps, less so than if attention had been drawn to the customary phrase by its unexpected absence. At any rate, Carneades had an opportunity of carrying back one more illustration of ethical inconsistency wherewith to enliven his lectures on the 'vanity of dogmatising' and the absolute equilibrium of contradictory opinions.

It has been mentioned that Carneades was the head of the Academic school. In that capacity, he was the lineal inheritor of Plato's teaching. Yet a public apology for injustice, even when balanced by a previous panegyric on its opposite, might seem to be of all lessons the most alien from Platonism; and in a State governed by Plato's own laws, it would certainly have been punishable with death. To explain this anomaly is to relate the history of Greek scepticism, which is what I shall now attempt to do.

II

In modern parlance, the word scepticism is often used to denote absolute unbelief. This, however, is a misapplication;

¹ Plutarch, *Cato Major*, xxii.

and, properly speaking, it should be reserved, as it was by the Greeks, for those cases in which belief is simply withheld, or in which, as its etymology implies, the mental state connoted is a desire to consider of the matter before coming to a decision. But, of course, there are occasions when, either from prudence or politeness, absolute rejection of a proposition is veiled under the appearance of simple indecision or of a demand for further evidence ; and at a time when to disbelieve in certain theological dogmas was either dangerous or discreditable, the name sceptic may have been accepted on all hands as a convenient euphemism in speaking about persons who did not doubt, but denied them altogether. Again, taken in its original sense, the name sceptic is applicable to two entirely different, or rather diametrically opposite classes. The true philosopher is more slow to believe than other men, because he is better acquainted than they are with the rules of evidence, and with the apparently strong claims on our belief often possessed by propositions known to be false. To that extent, all philosophers are sceptics, and are rightly regarded as such by the vulgar ; although their acceptance of many conclusions which the unlearned reject without examination, has the contrary effect of giving them a reputation for extraordinary credulity or even insanity. And this leads us to another aspect of scepticism—an aspect under which, so far from being an element of philosophy, it is one of the most dangerous enemies that philosophy has to face. Instead of regarding the difficulties which beset the path of enquiry as a warning against premature conclusions, and a stimulus to more careful research, it is possible to make them a pretext for abandoning enquiry altogether. And it is also possible to regard the divergent answers given by different thinkers to the same problem, not as materials for comparison, selection, or combination, nor even as indications of the various directions in which a solution is not to be sought, but as a proof that the problem altogether passes the power of human reason to solve.

Were this intellectual despondency to issue in a permanent suspense of judgment, it would be bad enough ; but practically its consequences are of a much more mischievous character. The human mind is so constituted that it must either go forward or fall back ; in no case can it stand still. Accordingly, the lazy sceptic almost always ends by conforming to the established creeds and customs of his age or of the society in which he lives ; thus strengthening the hands of authority in its conflict with the more energetic or courageous enquirers, whose object is to discover, by the unaided efforts of reason, some new and positive principle either of action or of belief. And the guardians of orthodoxy are so well aware of the profit to be reaped from this alliance that, when debarred from putting down their

opponents by law or by public opinion, they anxiously foster false scepticism where it is already rampant, and endeavour to create it where it does not exist. Sometimes disinterested morality is the object of their attack, and at other times the foundations of inductive science. Their favourite formula is that whatever objections may be urged against their own doctrines, others equally strong may be urged against the results of free thought ; whereas the truth is that such objections, being applicable to all systems alike, exactly balance one another, leaving the special arguments against irrationalism to tell with as much force as before. And they also lay great stress on the internal dissensions of their assailants—dissensions which only bring out into more vivid relief the one point on which all are agreed, that, whatever else may be true, the traditional opinions are demonstrably false.

As might be expected from the immense exuberance of their intellectual life, we find every kind of scepticism represented among the Greeks ; and, as with their other philosophical tendencies, there is evidence of its existence previous to or independent of scientific speculation. Their very religion, though burdened with an enormous mass of fictitious legends, shows a certain unwillingness to transgress the more obvious laws of nature, not noticeable in the traditions of kindred or neighbouring races. Its tendency is rather to imagine supernatural causes for natural events, or to read a divine meaning into accidental occurrences, than to introduce impossibilities into the ordinary course of history. And some of its most marvellous stories are told in such a manner that the incredulous satire with which they were originally received is, by a beautiful play of irony, worked into the very texture of the narrative itself. For example, the Greeks were especially disinclined to believe that one of the lower animals could speak with a human voice, or that a dead man could be brought back to life—contradicted as both suppositions were by the facts of universal experience. So when the horse Xanthus replies to his master's reproaches, Homer adds that his voice was arrested by the Erinyes—that is to say, by the laws of nature ; and we may suspect that nothing more is intended by his speech than the interpretation which Achilles would spontaneously put on the mute and pathetic gaze of the faithful steed. And when, to illustrate the wondrous medical skill of Asclêpius, it is related that at last he succeeded in restoring a dead man to life, the story adds that for this impious deed both the healer and his patient were immediately transfixed by a thunderbolt from heaven.¹ Another impossibility is to predict with any certainty the future fate of individuals, and here also—as has been already observed in a different

¹ Pindar, *Fyth.*, iii., 96.

connexion¹—the Greeks showed their extreme scepticism with regard to any alleged contravention of a natural law, under the transparent disguise of stories about persons whom ambiguous predictions had lured to their fall.

It is even doubtful how far the Greek poets believed in the personality of their gods, or, what comes to the same thing, in their detachment from the natural objects in which a divine power was supposed to be embodied. Such a detachment is most completely realised when they are assembled in an Olympian council; but, as Hegel has somewhere observed, Homer never brings his gods together in this manner without presenting them in a ridiculous light—that is to say, without hinting that their existence must not be taken quite in earnest. And the existence of disembodied spirits seems to be similarly conceived by the great epic master. The life of the souls in Hades is not a continuance but a memory and a reflection of their life on earth. The scornful reply of Achilles to the congratulations of Odysseus implies, as it were, the consciousness of his own nonentity. By no other device could the irony of the whole situation, the worthlessness of a merely subjective immortality, be made so poignantly apparent.²

The characters in Homer are marked by this incredulous disposition in direct proportion to their general wisdom. When Agamemnon relates his dream to the assembled chiefs, Nestor dryly observes that if any one of less authority had told them such a story they would have immediately rejected it as untrue. Hector's outspoken contempt for augury is well known; and his indifference to the dying words of Patroclus is equally characteristic. In the *Odyssey*, Alcinous pointedly distinguishes his guest from the common run of travellers, whose words deserve no credit. That Telemachus should tell who is his father, with the uncomplimentary reservation that he has only his mother's word for it, is evidently meant as a proof of the young man's precocious shrewdness; and it is with the utmost difficulty that Penelope herself is persuaded of her husband's identity. So in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, nothing less than the report of an eye-witness will convince the Chorus of old men that Troy has really fallen.³ Finally, to complete the

¹ *Supra*, p. 47.

² It is said that the same ironical attitude continues to characterise the Greeks of our time. Col. Leake (quoted by Welcker, *Gr. Götterl.*, ii., p. 127) informs us that travellers in Greece are continually entertained with local fables which are everywhere repeated, but believed by nobody, least of all by the inhabitants of the district where they first originated. And Welcker adds, from his own experience, that the young Greeks who act as guides in the religious houses related the miraculous legends of the place with an enthusiasm and an eloquence which left him in doubt whether or not they themselves believed what they expected him to believe.

³ *Il.*, ii., 80; xii., 238; xvi., 859; *Od.*, i., 215; xi., 363; xxiii., 166; *Agamem.*, 477 sqq.

list of examples afforded independently of philosophical reflection, Herodotus repeatedly expresses disbelief in the stories told him, or, what is more remarkable, holds his judgment in suspense with regard to their veracity.

Scepticism, as a philosophical principle, is alien from early Greek thought ; but it is pervaded by a negative tendency exhibited in four different directions, all converging towards the later attitude of suspensive doubt. There are sharp criticisms on the popular mythology ; there are protests against the ascription of reality to sensible appearances ; there are contemptuous references on the part of some philosophers to the opinions held by others ; and there are occasional lamentations over the difficulty of getting at any truth at all. The importance, however, of these last utterances has been considerably exaggerated both in ancient and modern times. For, in some instances, they are attributable solely to the distrust of sense-perception, and in others they seem to express nothing more than a passing mood against which we must set the dogmatic conclusions elsewhere enunciated with perfect confidence by the same thinkers.¹ At the same time, we have to note, as an illustration of the standing connexion between theological belief and that kind of scepticism which is shown by distrust in man's power of discovering the truth for himself, that the strongest expressions of such a distrust are to be found in the two most religious of the pre-Socratic thinkers, Xenophanes and Empedocles.

III

A new period begins with the Greek Humanists. I use this term in preference to that of Sophists, because, as has been shown, in specially dealing with the subject, half the teachers known as Sophists made it their business to popularise physical science and to apply it to morality, while the other half struck out an entirely different line, and founded their educational system on the express rejection of such investigations ; their method being, in this respect, foreshadowed by the greatest poet of the age, who concentrates all his attention on the workings of the human mind, and followed by its greatest historian, with whom a similar study takes the place occupied by geography and natural history in the work of Herodotus. This absorption in human interests was unfavourable alike to the objects and to the methods of previous enquiry : to the former, as a diversion from the new studies ; to the latter, as inconsistent with the flexibility and many-sidedness of conscious mind. Hence the

¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.*, vii., 89 *sqq.* ; Zeller, *Ph.d. Gr.*, i., pp. 548, 804, 921, 1015 *sq.* (5th ed.).

true father of philosophical scepticism was Protagoras. With him, for the first time, we find full expression given to the proper sceptical attitude, which is one of suspense and indifference as opposed to absolute denial. He does not undertake to say whether the gods exist or not. He regards—or his followers regard—the real essence of nature as unknowable, on account of the relativity which characterises all sensible impressions. And wherever opinions are divided, he undertakes to provide equally strong arguments for both sides of the question. He also anticipates the two principal tendencies exhibited by all future scepticism in its relation to practice. One is its devotion to humanity, under the double form of exclusive attention to human interests, and great mildness in the treatment of human beings. The other is a disposition to take custom and public opinion, rather than any physical or metaphysical law, for the standard and sanction of morality. Such scepticism might for the moment be hostile to religion; but a reconciliation was likely to be soon effected between them.

The famous theses of Gorgias were quoted in a former chapter as an illustration of the tactics pursued by Greek Humanism in its controversy with physical science. They must be noticed again in the present connexion, on account of their bearing on the development of scepticism, and as having inaugurated a method of reasoning often employed in subsequent attacks, directed, not against the whole of knowledge, but against particular parts of it. The scepticism of the Protagoreans rested on the assumption that there is an external reality from the reaction of which with mind all our perceptions proceed. Neither of these two factors can be known apart from the other, and as both are in a constant flux, our knowledge of the resulting compound at one time does not show what it has been or will be at another time.¹ But Gorgias altogether denied the existence of any objective reality; and he attempted to disprove it by an analytical instead of a synthetic argument, laying down a series of disjunctive propositions, and upsetting the different alternatives in succession.² Existence must be either something or nothing, or both together; and if something, it must be either finite or infinite, or both, and either one or many, or both. His argument against an infinite existence is altogether futile; but it serves to illustrate the undeveloped state of reflection at that period. The eternity of the world is confounded with its unlimited extension in space; and this hypothesis, again, is met by the transparent quibble that the world, not being in any one place, must be nowhere or not at all. And the alternative that the world has not always existed is

¹ Plato's *Thæætétus*, 156 A *sqq.*

² Sext. Emp., *Adv. Math.*, vii., 65 *sqq.*

refuted by the unproved assumption, which, apparently, no Greek philosopher ever thought of disputing, that nothing can begin without being caused by something else. Still, however contemptible such reasonings may seem, it is obvious that in them we have the first crude form of the famous antinomies by which Kant long afterwards sought to prove the impossibility of a world existing in space and time apart from a percipient subject, and which have since been used to establish in a more general way the unknowability of existence as such. It will also be observed that the sceptical arguments respectively derived from the relativity of thought and from the contradictions inherent in thought's ultimate products are run together by modern agnostics. But no reason that I can remember has ever been given to show that an idea is necessarily subjective because it is self-contradictory.

The second thesis of Gorgias was that, even granting the world to exist, it could not possibly be known. Here the reasoning is unexpectedly weak. Because all thoughts do not represent facts,—as, for example, our ideas of impossible combinations, like chariots running over the sea,—it is assumed that none do. But the problem how to distinguish between true and false ideas was raised; and it was round this that the fiercest battle between dogmatists and sceptics subsequently raged. And in the complete convertibility of consciousness and reality postulated by Gorgias, we may find the suggestion of a point sometimes overlooked in the automatist controversy—namely, that the impossibility, if any, of our acting on the material world reciprocally involves the impossibility of its acting on us, in so far as we are conscious beings. If thought cannot be translated into movement, neither can movement be translated into thought.

The third thesis maintains that, granting the world to exist and to be knowable, one man cannot communicate his knowledge to another; for, the different classes of sensations being heterogeneous, a visual or tactual impression on our consciousness cannot be conveyed by an auditory impression on the consciousness of some one else. This difficulty has been completely overcome by the subsequent progress of thought. We cannot, it is true, directly communicate more than a few sensations to one another; but by producing one we may call up others with which it has become associated through previous experience. And the great bulk of our knowledge has been analysed into relations of co-existence, succession, and resemblance, which are quite independent of the particular symbols employed to transmit them from one mind to another.

The scepticism of Aristippus and the Cyrenaics mediated between the views of Protagoras and those of Gorgias, while

marking an advance on both. According to this school, we know nothing beyond our own feelings, and it must be left undecided whether they are caused by an external reality or not. Nor can the feelings of one individual justify us in reasoning to the existence of similar feelings in the mind of another individual.¹ It might be objected that the arguments advanced in support of the latter assertion are suicidal, for they are derived from the abnormal states of consciousness accompanying particular diseases, or else from the divergences of taste exhibited by different individuals even when in good health,—an apparent admission that we are sufficiently well acquainted with the phenomena in question to institute a comparison between them, which, by hypothesis, is impossible. And this is, in fact, the method by which Herbert Spencer has endeavoured to upset the whole theory of subjective idealism, as involving at every step an assumption of the very realities that it professes to deny. But the Cyrenaic and the modern idealist have a perfect right to show that the assumptions of their adversaries are self-contradictory; and the readiest way of so doing is to reason from them as if they were true. The real answer to that extreme form of idealism which denies the possibility of making known our feelings to each other is that, our bodies being similarly constructed and responding to similar impressions by similar manifestations, I have the same sort of warrant for assuming that your states of consciousness are like mine that I have for assuming you to exist at all. The inference must, of course, be surrounded by proper precautions, such as are seldom used by unscientific reasoners. We must make sure that the structure is the same and that the excitement is the same, or that their differences, if any, are insignificant, before we can attribute the same value to the same manifestations of feeling on the part of different persons; but that this can be done, at least in the case of the elementary sensations, is shown by the easy detection of such anomalies as colour-blindness where they exist.

With Socrates and Plato, scepticism exhibits itself under two new aspects: as an accompaniment of religious belief, and as an element of constructive thought. Thus they represent both the good and the bad side of this tendency: the aspect under which it is a help, and the aspect under which it is a hindrance to scientific investigation. With both philosophers, however, the restriction or negation of human knowledge was a consequence rather than a cause of their theological convictions; nor do they seem to have appreciated its value as a weapon in the controversy with religious unbelief. When Socrates represented the irreconcilable divergence in the explanations

¹ Sext. Emp., *loc. cit.*, 170 sqq.

of nature offered by previous thinkers as a sufficient condemnation of their several pretensions, he did not set this fact against the arguments by which a Xenophanes had similarly endeavoured to overthrow the popular mythology ; but he looked on it as a fatal consequence of their insane presumption in meddling with the secrets of the gods. On one occasion only, when explaining to Euthydêmus that the invisibility of the gods is no reason for doubting their existence, he argues, somewhat in Butler's style, that our own minds, whose existence we cannot doubt, are equally invisible.¹ And the Platonic Socrates makes it his business to demonstrate the universality of human ignorance, not as a caution against dogmatic unbelief, but as a glorification of the divine knowledge ; though how we come to know that there is any such knowledge he leaves utterly unexplained.

In Plato's *Parmenides* we have to note the germ of a new dialectic. There it is suggested that we may overcome the difficulties attending a particular theory—in this instance the theory of self-existing ideas—by considering how much greater are the difficulties which would ensue on its rejection. The arguments advanced by Zeno the Eleatic against the reality of motion are mentioned as a case in point ; and Plato proceeds to illustrate his proposed method by showing what consequences respectively follow if we first assume the existence, and then the non-existence of the One ; but the whole analysis seems valueless for its immediate purpose, since the resulting impossibilities on either side are left exactly balanced ; and Plato does not, like some modern metaphysicians, call in our affections to decide the controversy.

The method by which Plato eventually found his way out of the sceptical difficulty, was to transform it from a subjective law of thought into an objective law of things. Adopting the Heracleitean physics as a sufficient explanation of the material world, he conceived, at a comparatively early period of his mental evolution, that the fallaciousness of sense-impressions is due, not to the senses themselves, but to the instability of the phenomena with which they deal ; and afterwards, on discovering that the interpretation of ideal relations was subject to similar perplexities, he assumed that, in their case also, the contradiction arises from a combination of the Same with the Other determining whatever differences prevail among the ultimate elements of things. And, finally, like Empedocles, he solved the problem of cognition by establishing a parallel between the human soul and the universe as a whole ; the circles of the Same and the Other being united in the celestial orbits and also in the mechanism of the brain.²

¹ Xen., *Mem.*, iv., 3, 14.

² *Timæus*, 37, B, 43, D *sqq.*

It was by an analogous, though, of course, far more complicated and ingenious adjustment, that Hegel sought to overcome the agnosticism which Kant professed to have founded on a basis of irrefragable proof. With Hegel, however, the sceptical principle was celebrating its supreme triumph at the moment of its fancied overthrow. The dogmatism of doubt could go no further than to resolve the whole chain of existence into a succession of mutually contradictory ideas.

If the synthesis of affirmation and negation cannot profitably be used to explain the origin of things in themselves, it has a real and very important function when limited to the subjective sphere, to the philosophy of practice and of belief. It was so employed by Socrates, and, on a much greater scale, by Plato himself. To consider every proposition from opposite points of view, and to challenge the claim of every existing custom on our respect, was a proceeding first instituted by the master—unless we are to say that he learned it from Protagoras—and carried out by the disciple in a manner which has made his investigations a model for every future enquirer. Something of their spirit was inherited by Aristotle; but, except in his logical treatises, it was overborne by the demands of a pre-eminently dogmatic and systematising genius. In criticising the theories of his predecessors, he has abundantly illustrated the power of dialectic, and he has enumerated its resources with conscientious completeness; but he has not verified his own conclusions by subjecting them to this formidable testing apparatus.

Meanwhile the scepticism of Protagoras had not been entirely absorbed into the systems of his rivals, but continued to exist as an independent tradition, or in association with a simpler philosophy. The famous school of Megara, about which, unfortunately, we have received very little direct information, was nominally a development of the Socratic teaching on its logical side, as the Cynic and Cyrenaic schools were on its ethical side, but like them also, it seems to have a more real connexion with the great impulse previously given to speculation by the Sophists. At any rate, we chiefly hear of the Megarians as having denied the possibility of definition, to which Socrates attached so much importance, and as framing questions not susceptible of a categorical answer,—an evident satire on the Socratic method of eliciting the truth by cross-examination.¹ What they really derived from Socrates seems to have been his mental concentration and independence of external circumstances. Here they closely resembled the Cynics, as also in their contempt for formal logic; but while Antisthenes found a

¹ Examples of these questions are: 'Have you lost your horns?' and, 'Did Electra know that Orestes was her brother?' Stated in words, she knew that he was; but she did not recognise him as her brother when he came to her in disguise.

sanction for his indifference and impassivity in the order of nature, their chief representative, Stilpo, achieved the same result by pushing the sceptical principle to consequences from which even the Cyrenaics would have shrunk. Denying the possibility of attaching a predicate to a subject, he seems, in like manner, to have isolated the mind from what are called its affections, or, at least, to have made this isolation his ideal of the good. Even the Stoics did not go to such a length; and Seneca distinguishes himself from the followers of Stilpo by saying, 'Our sage feels trouble while he overcomes it, whereas theirs does not feel it at all.'¹

IV

So far, the sceptical theory had been put forward after a somewhat fragmentary fashion, and in strict dependence on the previous development of dogmatic philosophy. With the Humanists it had taken the form of an attack on physical science; with the Megarians, of a criticism on the Socratic dialectic; with both, it had been pushed to the length of an absolute negation, logically not more defensible than the affirmations to which it was opposed. What remained was that, after being consistently formulated, its results should be exhibited in their systematic bearing on the practical interests of mankind. The twofold task was accomplished by Pyrrho, whose name has accordingly continued to be associated, even in modern times, with the profession of universal doubt. This remarkable man was a native of Elis, where a branch of the Megarian school had at one time established itself; and it seems likely that the determining impulse of his life was, directly or indirectly, derived from Stilpo's teaching. A contemporary of Alexander the Great, he accompanied the Macedonian army on its march to India, subsequently returning to his native city, where he died at an advanced age, about 275 B.C. The absurd stories about his indifference to material obstacles when out walking have been already mentioned in a former chapter, and are sufficiently refuted by the circumstances just related. The citizens of Elis are said to have shown their respect for the philosopher by exempting him from taxation, appointing him their chief priest—no inappropriate office for a sceptic of the true type—and honouring his memory with a statue, which was still pointed out to sightseers in the time of Pausanias.²

Pyrrho, who probably no more believed in books than in anything else, never committed his opinions to writing; and what we know of them is derived from the reports of his disciples,

¹ Plutarch, *Adv. Col.*, xxii.-xxiii.; Seneca, *Epp.*, ix.

² Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., I, pp. 481 *sqq.*; Laert. D., ix., II.

which, again, are only preserved in a very incomplete form by the compilers of the empire. According to these, Pyrrho began by declaring that the philosophic problem might be summed up in the three following questions: 'What is the nature of things? What should be our relation to them? What is the practical consequence of this determination?' Of its kind, this statement is probably the best ever framed, and might be accepted with equal readiness by every school of thought. But the scepticism of Pyrrho at once reveals itself in his answer to the first question. We know nothing about things in themselves. Every assertion made respecting them is liable to be contradicted, and neither of the two opposing propositions deserves more credence than the other. The considerations by which Pyrrho attempts to establish this proposition were probably suggested by the systems of Plato and Aristotle. The only possible avenues of communication with the external world are, he tells us, sense and reason. Of these the former was so universally discredited that he seems to have regarded any elaborate refutation of its claims as superfluous. What we perceive by our senses is the appearance, not the reality of things. This is exactly what the Cyrenaics had already maintained. The inadequacy of reason is proved by a more original method. Had men any settled principles of judgment, they would agree on questions of conduct, for it is with regard to these that they are best informed, whereas the great variety of laws and customs shows that the exact opposite is true. They are more hopelessly divided on points of morality than on any other.¹ It will be remembered that Pyrrho's fellow-townsmen, Hippias, had, about a hundred years earlier, founded his theory of Natural Law on the arbitrary and variable character of custom. The result of combining his principles with those professed by Protagoras and Gorgias was to establish complete moral scepticism; but it would be a mistake to suppose that moral distinctions had no value for him personally, or that they were neglected in his public teaching.

Timon, a celebrated disciple of Pyrrho, added another and, from the speculative point of view, a much more powerful argument, which, however, may equally have been borrowed from the master's lectures. Readers of the *Posterior Analytics* will remember how strongly Aristotle dwells on the necessity of starting with first principles which are self-evidently true. The chain of demonstration must have something to hang on, it cannot be carried back *ad infinitum*. But Timon would not admit of such a thing as a first principle. Every assumption, he says, must rest on some previous assumption, and as this process cannot be continued for ever, there can be no demonstration at all. This became a very favourite weapon with the

¹ Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 484; Laert. D., ix., 83.

later Sceptics, and, still at the suggestion of Aristotle, they added the further 'trope' of compelling their adversaries to choose between going back *ad infinitum* and reasoning in a circle—in other words, proving the premises by means of the conclusion. Modern science would not feel much appalled by the sceptical dilemma. Its actual first principles are only provisionally assumed as ultimate, and it is impossible for us to tell how much farther their analysis may be pursued; while, again, their validity is guaranteed by the circular process of showing that the consequences deduced from them agree with the facts of experience. But as against those modern philosophers who, in adherence to the Aristotelian tradition, still seek to base their systems on first principles independent of any individual experience, the sceptical argument is unanswerable, and has even been strengthened by the progress of knowledge. To this day, thinkers of different schools cannot agree about the foundations of belief, and what to one seems self-evidently true, is to another either conceivably or actually false. To Herbert Spencer 'the persistence of force' is a necessary truth; to Prof. Stanley Jevons its creation is a perfectly possible contingency; while to others, again, the whole conception of force, as understood by Spencer, is so absolutely unmeaning that they would decline to entertain any proposition about the invariability of the objective reality which it is supposed to represent. And when the *a priori* dogmatist affects to treat the negations of his opponents as something that they do not think, but only think they think, they may, with perfect fairness, attribute his rejection of their beliefs—as, for example, freewill—to a similar subjective illusion. Moreover, the pure experimentalists can point to a circumstance not foreseen by the ancient sceptics, which is that propositions once generally regarded as incontrovertible by thinking men, are now as generally abandoned by them.

Having proved, to his satisfaction, that the nature of things is unknowable, Pyrrho proceeds to deal with the two remaining heads of the philosophic problem. To the question what should be our relation to a universe which we cannot reach, the answer is, naturally, one of total indifference. And the advantage to be derived from this attitude is, he tells us, that we shall secure the complete imperturbability wherein true happiness consists. The sceptical philosophy does not agree with Stilpo in denying the reality of actual and immediate annoyances, for it denies nothing; but it professes to dispel that very large amount of unhappiness which arises from the pursuit of fancied goods and the expectation of future calamities. In respect to the latter, what Pyrrho sought was to arrive by the exercise of reasoning at the tranquillity which unreasoning animals naturally enjoy. Thus, we are told that, when out at sea in a storm he called the

attention of the terrified passengers to a little pig which was quietly feeding in spite of the danger, and taught them that the wise man should attain to a similar kind of composure.

Various other anecdotes of more or less doubtful authenticity are related, showing that the philosopher could generally, though not always, act up to his own ideal of indifference. He lived with his sister, who was a midwife by profession, and patiently submitted to the household drudgery which she unsparingly imposed on him. Once, however, she succeeded in goading him into a passion; and on being rather inopportunately reminded of his professed principles by a bystander, the sceptic tartly replied that a wretched woman like that was no fit subject for a display of philosophical indifference. On another occasion, when taunted for losing his self-possession at the attack of a furious dog, he observed, with truth, that, after all, philosophers are human beings.¹

Thus we find Pyrrho competing with the dogmatists as a practical moralist, and offering to secure the inward tranquillity at which they too aimed by an easier method than theirs. The last eminent representative of the sceptical school, Sextus Empiricus, illustrates its pretensions in this respect by the well-known story of Apelles, who, after vainly endeavouring to paint the foam on a horse's mouth, took the sponge which he used to wipe his easel, and threw it at the picture in vexation. The mixture of colours thus accidentally applied produced the exact effect which he desired, but at which no calculation could arrive. In like manner, says Sextus, the confusion of universal doubt accidentally resulted in the imperturbability which accompanies suspense of judgment as surely as a body is followed by its shadow.² There was, however, no accident about the matter at all. The abandonment of those studies which related to the external world was a consequence of the ever-increasing attention paid to human interests, and that these could be best consulted by complete detachment from outward circumstances, was a conclusion inevitably suggested by the negative or antithetical moment of Greek thought. Hence, while the individualistic and apathetic tendencies of the age were shared by every philosophical school, they had a closer logical connexion with the idealistic than with the naturalistic method; and so it is among the successors of Protagoras that we find them developed with the greatest distinctness; while their incorporation with Stoicism imposed a self-contradictory strain on that system which it never succeeded in shaking off. Epicureanism occupied a position midway between the two extremes; and from this point

¹ ὡς χαλεπὸν εἶη ὁλοσχερῶς ἐκδύναι ἄνθρωπον. For this and the other stories, see Laert. D., ix., 66-8.

² *Pyrrh. Hyp.*, i., 28 sqq.

of view, we shall be better able to understand both its inherent weakness as compared with the other ancient philosophies, and the admiration which it has attracted from opposite quarters in recent years. To some it is most interesting as a revelation of law in nature, to others as a message of deliverance to man—not merely a deliverance from ignorance and passion, such as its rivals had promised, but from all established systems, whether religious, political, or scientific. And unquestionably Epicurus did endeavour to combine both points of view in his theory of life. In seeking to base morality on a knowledge of natural law he resembles the Stoics. In his attacks on fatalism, in his refusal to be bound down by a rigorously scientific explanation of phenomena, in his failure to recognise the unity and power of nature, and in his preference of sense to reason, he partially reproduces the negative side of Scepticism; in his identification of happiness with the tranquil and imperturbable self-possession of mind, in his mild humanism, and in his compliance with the established religion of the land, he entirely reproduces its positive ethical teaching. On the other hand, the two sides of his philosophy, so far from completing, interfere with and mar one another. Emancipation from the outward world would have been far more effectually obtained by a total rejection of physical science than by the construction of a theory whose details were, on any scientific principles, demonstrably untrue. The appeal to natural instinct as an argument for hedonism would, consistently followed out, have led to one of two conclusions, either of which is incompatible with the principle that imperturbability is the highest good. If natural instinct, as manifested by brutes, by children, and by savages, be the one sure guide of action, then Callicles was right, and the habitual indulgence of passion is wiser than its systematic restraint. But if nature is to be studied on a more specific and discriminating plan, if there are human as distinguished from merely animal impulses, and if the higher development of these should be our rule of life, then Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics were right, and the rational faculties should be cultivated for their own sake, not because of the immunity from superstitious terrors which they secure. And we may add that the attendance on public worship practised by Epicurus agreed much better with the sceptical suspense of judgment touching divine providence than with its absolute negation, whether accompanied or not by a belief in gods who are indifferent to sacrifice and prayer.

It was, no doubt, for these and similar reasons that all the most vigorous intellects of Hellas ranged themselves either on the Stoic or on the Sceptic side, leaving the half-hearted compromise of Epicurus to those who could not think out any one theory consistently, or who, like the Romans at first, were not

acquainted with any system but his. Henceforth, during a period of some centuries, the whole philosophic movement is determined by the interaction of these two fundamental forces. The first effect of their conflict was to impose on Scepticism an important modification, illustrating its essentially parasitic character. We have seen it, as a general tendency of the Greek mind, clinging to the very texture of mythology, accompanying the earliest systematic compilation of facts, aiding the humanistic attacks on physical science, associated with the first great religious reaction, operating as the dialectic of dialectic itself, and finally assuming the form of a shadowy morality, in rivalry with and imitation of ethical systems based on a positive and substantial doctrine. We have now to trace its metamorphosis into a critical system extending its ramifications in parallelism with the immense dogmatic structure of Stoicism, and simultaneously endeavouring to reach the same practical results by a more elastic adaptation to the infirmities of human reason and the uncertainties of sensible experience. As such, we shall also have to study its influence over the most plastic of Roman intellects, the great orator in whose writings Greek philosophy was reclothed with something of its ancient charm, so that many who were debarred from admission to the groves and porticoes of Athens have caught an echo of the high debates which once stirred their recesses, as they trod the shady slopes of Tusculum under his visionary guidance, or followed his searching eyes over the blue waters to Pompeii, while he reasoned on mind and its object, on sense and knowledge, on doubt and certainty, with Lucullus and Hortensius on the sunlit Baian shore. It is the history of the New Academy that we shall now proceed to trace.

V

When I last had occasion to speak of the Platonic school, it was represented by Polemo, one of the teachers from whose lessons Zeno the Stoic seems to have compiled his system. Under his superintendence, Platonism had completely abandoned the metaphysical traditions of its founder. Physics and dialectics had already been absorbed by Aristotelianism. Mathematics had passed into the hands of experts. Nothing remained but the theory of ethics; and, as an ethical teacher, Polemo was only distinguished from the Cynics by the elegance and moderation of his tone. Even this narrow standing-ground became untenable when exposed to the formidable competition of Stoicism. The precept, Follow nature, borrowed by the new philosophy from Polemo, acquired a far deeper significance than he could give it, when viewed in the light of an elaborate physical system showing what nature is, and whither her

guidance leads. But stone after stone had been removed from the Platonic superstructure and built into the walls of other edifices, only to bring its original foundation the more prominently into sight. This was the initial doubt of Socrates, widened into the confession of universal ignorance attributed to him by Plato in the *Apologia*. Only by returning to the exclusively critical attitude with which its founder had begun could the Academy hope to exercise any influence on the subsequent course of Greek speculation. And it was also necessary that the agnostic standpoint should be taken much more in earnest by its new representatives than by Socrates or Plato. With them it had been merely the preparation for a dogmatism even more self-confident than that of the masters against whom they fought; but if in their time such a change of front might seem compatible with the retention of their old strongholds, matters now stood on a widely different footing. Experience had shown that the purely critical position could not be abandoned without falling back on some one or other of the old philosophies, or advancing pretensions inconsistent with the dialectic which had been illustrated by their overthrow. The course marked out for Plato's successors by the necessities of thought might have been less evident had not Pyrrhonism suddenly revealed to them where their opportunities lay, and at the same time, by its extinction as an independent school, allowed them to step into the vacant place.

It was at this juncture that the voluntary withdrawal of an older fellow-pupil placed Arcesilaus at the head of the Academy. The date of his accession is not given, but we are told that he died 241 or 240 B.C. in the seventy-fifth year of his age. He must, therefore, have flourished a generation later than Zeno and Epicurus. Accomplished, witty, and generous, his life is described by some as considerably less austere than that of the excellent nonentities whom he succeeded. Yet its general goodness was testified to by no less an authority than his contemporary, the noble Stoic Cleanthes. 'Do not blame Arcesilaus,' exclaimed the latter to an unfriendly critic; 'if he denies duty in his words, he affirms it in his deeds.' 'You don't flatter me,' observed Arcesilaus. 'It is flattering you,' rejoined Cleanthes, 'to say that your actions belie your words.'¹ It might be inferred from this anecdote that the scepticism of the new teacher, like that of Carneades after him, was occasionally exercised on moral distinctions, which, as then defined and deduced, were assuredly open to very serious criticism. Even so, in following the conventional standard of the age, he would have been acting in perfect consistency with the principles of his school. But, as a matter of fact, his attacks seem to have been exclusively aimed

¹ Laert. D., vii.

at the Stoic criterion of certainty. We have touched on this difficult subject in a former chapter, but the present seems a more favourable opportunity for setting it forth in proper detail.

Like Herbert Spencer the Stoics held that all knowledge is ultimately produced by the action of the object on the subject. Being convinced, however, that each single perception, as such, is fallible, they sought for the criterion of certainty in the repetition and combination of individual impressions; and, again like Spencer, but also in complete accordance with their dynamic theory of nature, they estimated the validity of a belief by the degree of tenacity with which it is held. The various stages of assurance were carefully distinguished and arranged in an ascending series. First came simple perception, then simple assent, thirdly, comprehension, and finally demonstrative science. These mental acts were respectively typified by extending the forefinger, by bending it as in the gesture of beckoning, by clenching the fist, and by placing it, thus clenched, in the grasp of the other hand.¹ From another point of view, they defined a true conviction as that which can only be produced by the action of a corresponding real object on the mind. This theory was complicated still further by the Stoic interpretation of judgment as a voluntary act; by the ethical significance which it consequently received; and by the concentration of all wisdom in the person of an ideal sage. The unreserved bestowal of belief is a practical postulate dictated by the necessities of life; but only he who knows what those necessities are, in other words only the wise man, knows when the postulate is to be enforced. In short, the criterion of your being right is your conviction that you *are* right, and this conviction, if you really possess it, is a sufficient witness to its own veracity. Or again, it is the nature of man to act rightly, and he cannot do so unless he has right beliefs, confirmed and clinched by the consciousness that they are right.²

Arcesilaus left no writings, and his criticisms on the Stoic theory, as reported by Cicero and Sextus Empiricus, have a somewhat unsatisfactory appearance. By what we can make out, he seems to have insisted on the infallibility of the hypothetical sage to a much greater extent than the Stoics themselves, not allowing that there was any class of judgments in which he was liable to be mistaken. But just as the Stoics were obliged to accept suicide as an indispensable safeguard for the inviolability of their personal dignity and happiness, so also Arcesilaus had recourse to a kind of intellectual suicide for the

¹ Zeno quoted by Cicero, *Acad. Prior.* ii., 144. The final degree of assurance was possessed by the sage alone.

² Cicero, *ut supra*, ii., 37.

purpose of securing immunity from error. The only way, according to him, in which the sage can make sure of never being mistaken is never to be certain about anything. For, granting that every mental representation is produced by a corresponding object in the external world, still different objects are connected by such a number of insensible gradations that the impressions produced by them are virtually indistinguishable from one another ; while a fertile source of illusions also exists in the diversity of impressions produced by the same object acting on different senses and at different times. Moreover, the Stoics themselves admitted that the sage might form a mistaken opinion ; it was only for his convictions that they claimed unerring accuracy, each of the two—opinion and conviction—being the product of a distinct intellectual energy. Here again, Arcesilaus employed his method of infinitesimal transitions, refusing to admit that the various cognitive faculties could be separated by any hard and fast line ; especially as, according to the theory then held by all parties, and by none more strongly than the Stoics, intellectual conceptions are derived exclusively from the data of sense and imagination. We can see that the logic of Scepticism is, equally with that of the other Greek systems, determined by the three fundamental moments of Greek thought. There is first the careful circumscription of certainty ; then there is the mediating process by which it is insensibly connected with error ; and, lastly, as a result of this process, there is the antithetical opposition of a negative to an affirmative proposition on every possible subject of mental representation.¹

To the objection that his suspensive attitude would render action impossible, Arcesilaus replied that any mental representation was sufficient to set the will in motion ; and that, in choosing between different courses, probability was the most rational means of determination. But the task of reducing probable evidence to a system was reserved for a still abler dialectician, who did not appear on the scene until a century after his time. Arcesilaus is commonly called the founder of the Middle, Carneades (*circa* 214–129 B.C.) the founder of the New Academy. The distinction is, however, purely nominal. Carneades founded nothing. His principles were identical with those of his predecessor ; and his claim to be considered the greatest of the Greek sceptics is due to his having given those principles a wider application and a more systematic development. The Stoics regarded it as a special dispensation of providence that Chrysippus, the organising genius of their school, should have come between its two most formidable opponents, being thus placed in a position to answer the objections of the one and to

¹ Cicero, *Acad. Prior.*, ii., 24, 77 ; Sext. Emp., *Adv. Math.*, vii., 150–7 ; Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, pp. 492 *sqq.*

refute by anticipation those of the other.¹ It might seem to less prejudiced observers that the thinker whose cause benefited most by this arrangement was Carneades. Parodying a well-known iambic, he used to say :

‘Without Chrysippus I should not have been.’²

And, in fact, it was by a close study of that writer’s voluminous treatises that he was able to cover the immense extent of ground which Scepticism thenceforward disputed with the dogmatic schools. Nor were his attacks directed against Stoicism only, but against all other positive systems past and present as well. What he says about the supposed foundation of knowledge is even now an unanswerable objection to the transcendental realism of Herbert Spencer. States of consciousness speak for themselves alone, they do not include the consciousness of an external cause.³ But the grounds on which he rests his negation of all certainty are still superficial enough, being merely those sensible illusions which the modern science of observation has been able either to eliminate altogether or to restrict within narrow and definable limits. That phenomena, so far from being necessarily referred to a cause which is not phenomenal, cannot be thought of at all except in relation to one another, and that knowledge means nothing more than a consciousness of this relation, was hardly perceived before the time of Hume.

Turning from sense to reason, Carneades attacks the syllogistic process on grounds already specified in connexion with the earlier Sceptics ; and also on the plea that to prove the possibility of syllogism is itself to syllogise, and thus involves either a *petitio principii* or a regress *ad infinitum*.⁴ Such a method is, of course, suicidal, for it disproves the possibility of the alleged disproof, a consideration which the Stoics did not fail to urge, and which the later Sceptics could only meet by extending the rule of suspense to their own arguments against argument.⁵ Nevertheless the sceptical analysis detected some difficulties in the ordinary theory of logic, which have been revived in modern times, and have not yet received any satisfactory solution. Sextus Empiricus, probably copying an earlier authority, it may be Carneades himself, observes that, as the major premise of every syllogism virtually contains the minor, it is either superfluous, or assumes the proposition to be

¹ Plutarch, *De Comm. Notit.*, i., 4 ; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 81, note 1 (where, however, the reference to Plutarch is wrongly given).

² Εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἦν Χρύσιππος οὐκ ἂν ἦν ἐγώ. (Laert. D., iv., 62.) The original line ran, εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἦν Χρύσιππος οὐκ ἂν ἦν στωά.

³ Sext. Emp., *Adv. Math.*, vii., 159-65.

⁴ That Carneades was the first to start this difficulty cannot be directly proved, but is conjectured with great probability by Zeller (*op. cit.*, p. 504).

⁵ Sext., *Pyrrh. Hyp.*, ii., 187. *Adv. Math.*, viii., 473.

proved. Thus we argue that Socrates is an animal because he is a man, and all men are animals. But if we do not know this latter proposition to be true in the case of Socrates, we cannot be sure that it is true in any case; while if we know it to be true in his case, we do not need to begin by stating it in general terms. And he also attempts to show the impossibility of a valid induction by the consideration, since so often urged, that to generalise from a limited number of instances to a whole class is unsafe, for some of the unknown instances may be contradictory, while the infinite, or at least indefinite multiplicity of individuals precludes the possibility of their exhaustive enumeration.¹

When the Academicians pass from the form to the matter of dogmatic philosophy, their criticisms acquire greater interest and greater weight. On this ground, their assaults are principally directed against the theology of their Stoic and Epicurean rivals. It is here in particular that Carneades reveals himself to us as the Hume of antiquity. Never has the case for agnosticism been more powerfully made out than by him or by the disciples whom he inspired. To the argument for the existence of supernatural beings derived from universal consent, he replies, first, that the opinion of the vulgar is worthless, and secondly, that men's beliefs about the gods are hopelessly at variance with one another, even the same divinity being made the subject of numberless discordant legends.² He reduces the polytheistic deification of natural objects to an absurdity by forcing it back through a series of insensible gradations into absolute fetichism.³ The personification of mental qualities is similarly treated, until an hypothesis is provided for every passing mood.⁴ Then, turning to the more philosophical deism of the Stoics, he assails their theory of the divine benevolence with instance after instance of the apparent malevolence and iniquity to be found in nature; vividly reminding one of the facts adduced by Herbert Spencer in confutation of the similar views held by modern English theologians.⁵ As against the whole theory of final causes, Carneades argues after a method which, though logically sound, could not then present itself with the authority which advancing science has more recently shown it to possess. 'What you Stoics,' he says, 'explain as the result of conscious purpose, other philosophers, like Strato for instance, explain with equal plausibility as the result of natural causation. And such is our ignorance of the forces at work in nature that even where no

¹ *Pyrrh., Hyp.*, ii., 196, 204.

² Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.*, i., 23; iii., 4, 16, 21.

³ *Sext. Adv. Math.*, ix., 182 *sqq.*

⁴ Cic., *De Nat. Deor.*, iii., 18, 47.

⁵ Cic., *Acad.*, ii., 38, 120; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 506.

mechanical cause can be assigned, it would be presumptuous to maintain that none can exist.¹ The reign of law does not necessarily prove the presence of intelligence; it is merely the evidence of a uniform movement quite consistent with all that we know about the working of unconscious forces.² To contend, with Socrates, that the human mind must be derived from a Universal Mind pervading all nature would logically involve the transfer of every human attribute to its original source.³ And to say that the Supreme Being, because it surpasses man, must possess an intelligence like his, is no more rational than to make the same assumption with regard to a great city because it is superior to an ant.⁴

The materialism of his dogmatic contemporaries placed them at a terrible disadvantage when the sceptical successor of Plato went on to show that eternal duration is incompatible with whatever we know about the constitution of corporeal substance; and this part of his argument applied as much to the Epicurean as to the Stoic religion.⁵ But even a spiritualistic monotheism is not safe from his dissolving criticism. According to Carneades, a god without senses has no experience of whatever pleasurable or painful feelings accompany sensation, and is therefore, to that extent, more ignorant than a man; while to suppose that he experiences painful sensations is the same as making him obnoxious to the diminished vitality and eventual death with which they are naturally associated. And, generally speaking, all sensation involves a modification of the sentient subject by an external object, a condition necessarily implying the destructibility of the former by the latter.⁶ So also, moral goodness is an essentially relative quality, inconceivable without the possibility of succumbing to temptation, which we cannot attribute to a perfect Being.⁷ In a word, whatever belongs to conscious life being relative and conditioned, personality is excluded from the Absolute by its very definition.

As to the proofs of divine agency derived from divination, they are both irrational and weak. If all things are predetermined by God's providence, knowledge of the future is useless, and, therefore, cannot have been given to us. Moreover, no confidence can be placed in the alleged fulfilments of prophecy; probably most of them are fictitious and the remainder accidental. For the rest, good luck is distributed

¹ Cic., *Acad.*, *ibid.*, 121; *De Nat. Deor.*, iii., 11, 27-8; *ibid.*, i., 13, 35.

² Cic., *Ibid.*, iii., 10, 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 11, 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ix., 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12, 29; i., 39, 109 *sqq.*

⁶ Sext., *Adv. Math.*, ix., 139-47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-77.

without regard to merit ; and the general corruption of mankind shows that, from the Stoic point of view, human nature is a complete failure.¹

Well may Ernest Havet say of the Academicians ; ‘ ce sont eux et non les partisans d’Épicure qui sont les libres penseurs de l’antiquité ou qui l’auraient voulu être ; mais ils ne le pouvaient pas.’² They could not, for their principles were as inconsistent with an absolute negation as with an absolute affirmation ; while in practice their rule was conformity to the custom of the country ; the consequence of which was that Sceptics and Epicureans were equally assiduous in their attendance at public worship. It is, therefore, with perfect dramatic appropriateness that Cicero puts the arguments of Carneades into the mouth of Cotta, the Pontifex Maximus ; and, although himself an augur, takes the negative side in a discussion on divination with his brother Quintus. And our other great authority on the sceptical side, Sextus Empiricus, is not less emphatic than Cotta in protesting his devotion to the traditional religion of the land.³

We have seen with what freedom Carneades discussed the foundations of morality. It is now evident that in so doing he did not exceed the legitimate functions of criticism. No one at the present day looks on Alexander Bain and Henry Sidgwick as dangerous teachers because they made it clear that to pursue the greatest happiness of the greatest number is not always the way to secure a maximum of happiness for oneself. The really dangerous method, as we now see, is to foster illusions in early life which subsequent experience must dispel.

With the introduction of practical questions, we pass to the great positive achievement of Carneades, his theory of probable evidence. Intended as an account of the process by which belief is adjusted to safe action rather than of the process by which it is brought into agreement with reality, his logic is a systematisation of the principles by which prudent men are unconsciously guided in common life. Carneades distinguishes three degrees of probability. The lowest is attached to simple perception. This arises when we receive the impression of an object without taking the attendant circumstances into account. The next step is reached when our first impression is confirmed by the similar impressions received from its attendant circumstances ; and when each of these, again, bears the test of a similar examination our assurance is complete. The first belief is simply probable ; the second is probable

¹ Cic., *De Nat. Deor.*, iii., 6 ; *De Divin.*, ii., *passim* ; *De Nat. Deor.*, iii., 26 *sqq.*

² *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, ii., p. 3.

³ Sext., *Pyrrh. Hyp.*, iii., 2.

and uncontradicted; the third probable, uncontradicted, and methodically established. The example given by Sextus is that of a person who on seeing a coil of rope in a dark passage thinks that it may be a snake, and jumps over it, but on turning round and observing that it remains motionless feels inclined to form a different opinion. Remembering, however, that snakes are sometimes congealed by cold in winter, he touches the coil with his stick, and finally satisfies himself by means of this test that the image present to his mind does not really represent a snake. The circumstances to be examined before arriving at a definite judgment include such considerations as whether our senses are in a healthy condition, whether we are wide awake, whether the air is clear, whether the object is steady, and whether we have taken time enough to be sure that the conditions here specified are fulfilled. Each degree of probability is, again, divisible into several gradations according to the strength of the impressions received and the greater or less consilience of all the circumstances involved.¹

The Academic theory of probability bears some resemblance to the Canonic of Epicurus, and may have been partially suggested by it. Both are distinguished from the Aristotelian and Stoic logic by the care with which they provide for the absence of contradictory evidence. In this point, however, the superiority of Carneades to Epicurus is very marked. It is not enough for him that a present impression should suggest a belief not inconsistent with past experience; in the true inductive spirit, he expressly searches for negative instances, and recommends the employment of experiment for this purpose. Still more philosophical is the careful and repeated analysis of attendant circumstances, a precaution not paralleled by anything in the slovenly method of his predecessor. Here the great value of scepticism as an element in mental training becomes at once apparent. The extreme fallibility of the *intellectus sibi permissus* had to be established before precautions could be adopted for its restraint. But the evidence accepted in proof of this fallibility has been very different at different times, and has itself given rise to more than one fallacious interpretation. With us it is, for the most part, furnished by experience. The circumstance that many demonstrable errors were formerly received as truths is quite sufficient to put us on our guard against untested opinions. With Bacon, it was not the erroneousness of previous systems, but their barrenness and immobility, which led him to question the soundness of their logic; and his doubts were confirmed by an analysis of the disturbing influences under which men's judgments are formed.

¹ Sext., *Adv. Math.*, vii., 166-89.

The ancient Sceptics were governed entirely by a *priori* considerations. Finding themselves confronted by an immense mass of contradictory opinions, they argued that some of these must be false as all could not possibly be true. And an analysis of the human faculties led them, equally on a *priori* grounds, to the conclusion that these irreconcilable divergences were but the result and the reproduction of an interminable conflict carried on within the mind itself. They could not foresee how much time would do towards reducing the disagreement of educated opinion within a narrower compass. They did not know what the experience of experience itself would teach. And their criticisms on the logic and metaphysics of their opponents were rendered inconclusive, as against all certainty, by the extent to which they shared that logic and metaphysics themselves. Carneades, at least, seems to assume throughout that all existence is material, that there is a sharp distinction between subject and object in knowledge, and that there is an equally sharp distinction between sensation and reasoning in the processes by which knowledge is obtained. In like manner, his ethical scepticism all turns on the axiom, also shared by him with the Stoics, (that for a man to be actuated by any motive but his own interest is mere folly)

Modern agnosticism occupies the same position with regard to the present foundation and possible future extension of human knowledge as was occupied by the ancient Sceptics with regard to the possibility of all knowledge. Its conclusions also are based on a very insufficient experience of what can be effected by experience, and on an analysis of cognition largely adopted from the system which it seeks to overthrow. Like Scepticism also, when logically thought out, it tends to issue in a self-contradiction, at one time affirming the consciousness of what is, by definition, beyond consciousness; and at another time dogmatically determining the points on which we must remain for ever ignorant. It may be that some problems, as stated by modern thinkers, are insoluble; but perhaps we may find our way out of them by transforming the question to be solved.

If, in the domain of pure speculation, Spencerian agnosticism exaggerates the existing divergences, in ethics its whole effort is, contrariwise, to reduce and reconcile them. Such was also the tendency of Carneades. He declared that, in their controversy about the highest good, the difference between the Stoics and the Peripatetics was purely verbal. Both held that we are naturally framed for the pursuit of certain objects, and that virtuous living is the only means by which they can be attained. But while the disciples of Aristotle held that the satisfaction of our natural impulses

remains from first to last the only end, the disciples of Zeno insisted that at some point—not, as would seem very particularly specified—virtuous conduct, which was originally the means towards this satisfaction, becomes substituted for it as the supreme and ultimate good.¹ That the point at issue was more important than it seemed is evident from its reproduction under another form in modern ethical philosophy. For, among ourselves, the controversy between utilitarianism and what, for want of a better name, we must call intuitionism, is gradually narrowing itself to the question whether the pursuit of another's good has or has not a higher value than the quantity of pleasure which accrues to him from it, *plus* the effects of a good example and the benefits that society at large is likely to gain from the strength which exercise gives to the altruistic dispositions of one of its members. Those who attribute an absolute value to altruism, as such, connect this value in some way or other with the spiritual welfare of the agent; and they hold that without such a gain to himself he would gradually fall back on a life of calculating selfishness or of unregulated impulse. Here we have the return from a social to an individual morality. The Stoics, conversely, were feeling their way from the good of the individual to that of the community; and they could only bridge the chasm by converting what had originally been a means towards self-preservation into an end in itself. This Carneades could not see. Convinced that happiness was both necessary and attainable, but convinced also that the systems which had hitherto offered it as their reward were logically untenable, he wished to place morality on the broad basis of what was held in common by all schools, and this seemed to be the rule of obedience to nature's dictates,—a rule which had also the great merit of bidding men do in the name of philosophy what they already felt inclined to do without any philosophy at all. We are told, indeed, that he would not commit himself to any particular system of ethics; the inference, however, is not that he ignored the necessity of a moral law, but that he wished to extricate it from a compromising alliance with untenable speculative dogmas. Nevertheless his acceptance of nature as a real entity was a survival of metaphysics; and his morality was, so far as it went, an incipient return to the traditions of the Old Academy.

VI

We have now reached a point where Greek philosophy seems to have swung back into the position which it occupied three

¹ Cic., *De Fin.*, iii. 12, 41; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 519.

hundred years before, towards the close of the Peloponnesian War. The ground is again divided between naturalists and humanists, the one school offering an encyclopaedic training in physical science and exact philology, the other literary, sceptical, and limiting its attention to the more immediate interests of life; but both agreeing in the supreme importance of conduct, and differing chiefly as to whether its basis should or should not be sought in a knowledge of the external world. Materialism is again in the ascendant, to this extent at least, that no other theory is contemplated by the students of physical science; while the promise of a spiritualistic creed is to be found, if at all, in the school whose scepticism throws it back on the subjective sphere, the invisible and impalpable world of mind. The attitude of philosophy towards religion has, indeed, undergone a marked change; for the Stoic naturalists count themselves among the most strenuous supporters of beliefs and practices which their Sophistic predecessors had condemned, while the humanist criticism is cautiously guarded by at least an external conformity to established usage; but the Platonic doctrine of immortality has disappeared with the dogmatic spiritualism on which it rested; and faith in superior beings tends to dissociate itself from morality, or to become identified with a simple belief in the fixity of natural law.

Whenever naturalism and scepticism have thus stood opposed, the result has been their transformation or absorption into a new philosophy, combining the systematic formalism of the one with the introspective idealism of the other. In Greece such a revolution had already been effected once before by Plato; and a restoration of his system seemed the most obvious solution that could offer itself on the present occasion. Such was, in fact, the solution eventually adopted; what we have to explain is why its adoption was delayed so long. For this various reasons may be offered. To begin with, the speculative languor of the age was unfavourable to the rise of a new school. Greece was almost depopulated by the demands of foreign service; and at Alexandria, where a new centre of Hellenism had been created, its best energies were absorbed by the cultivation of positive science, of imitative literature, and of erudite criticism. It was, no doubt, in great part owing to the dearth of ability that ideas which, at an earlier period, would have been immediately taken up and developed, were allowed to remain stationary for a hundred years—the interval separating a Carneades from an Arcesilaus. The regular organisation of philosophical teaching was another hindrance to progress. A certain amount of property was annexed to the headships of the different schools, and served as an endowment, not of research but of contented acquiescence in the received traditions.

Moreover, the jealousy with which the professors of rival doctrines would naturally regard one another, was likely to prevent their mutual approximation from going beyond certain not very close limits, and might even lead to a still severer definition of the characteristic tenets which still kept them apart. Another and deeper disturbing force lay in the dissensions which, at a very early stage of its development, had split the spiritualistic philosophy into two opposing tendencies respectively represented by Plato and Aristotle. Any thinker who wandered away from the principles either of Stoicism or of Scepticism was more likely to find himself bewildered by the conflicting claims of these two illustrious masters, than to discern the common ground on which they stood, or to bring them within the grasp of a single reconciling system. Finally, an enormous perturbation in the normal course of speculation was produced by the entrance of Rome on the philosophical scene. But before estimating the influence of this new force, we must follow events to the point at which it first becomes of calculable importance.

We have seen how Carneades, alike in his theory of probability and in his ethical eclecticism, had departed from the extreme sceptical standpoint. His successor, Clitomachus, was content with committing the doctrines of the master to writing. A further step was taken by the next Scholarch, Philo, who is known as the Larissæan, in order to distinguish him from his more celebrated namesake, the Alexandrian Jew. This philosopher asserted that the negations of the New Academy were not to be taken as a profession of absolute scepticism, but merely as a criticism on the untenable pretensions of the Stoa. His own position was that, as a matter of fact, we have some certain knowledge of the external world, but that no logical account can be given of the process by which it is obtained—we can only say that such an assurance has been naturally stamped on our minds.¹ This is the theory of intuitions or innate ideas, still held by many persons ; and, as such, it marks a return to pure Platonism, having been evidently suggested by the semi-mythological fancies of the *Meno* and the *Phædrus*. With Philo as with those Scotch professors who long afterwards took up substantially the same position, the leading motive was a practical one, the necessity of placing morality on some stronger ground than that of mere probability. Neither he nor his imitators saw that if ethical principles are self-evident, they need no objective support ; if they are derivative and contingent, they cannot impart to metaphysics a certainty which they do not independently possess. The return to the old Academic standpoint was completed by a much more

¹ According to Zeller's interpretation of Cicero, *Acad.*, ii., 11, 34.

vigorous thinker than Philo, his pupil, opponent, and eventual successor, Antiochus. So far from attempting any compromise with the Sceptics, this philosopher openly declared that they had led the school away from its true traditions; and claimed for his own teaching the merit of reproducing the original doctrine of Plato.¹ In reality, he was, as Zeller has shown, an eclectic.² It is by arguments borrowed from Stoicism that he vindicates the certainty of human knowledge. Pushing the practical postulate to its logical conclusion, he maintains, not only that we are in possession of the truth, but also—what Philo had denied—that true beliefs bear on their face the evidence by which they are distinguished from illusions. Admitting that the senses are liable to error, he asserts the possibility of rectifying their mistakes, and of reasoning from a subjective impression to its objective cause. The Sceptical negation of truth he meets with the familiar argument that it is suicidal, for to be convinced that there can be no conviction is a contradiction in terms; while to argue that truth is indistinguishable from falsehood implies an illogical confidence in the validity of logical processes; besides involving the assumption that there are false appearances and that they are known to us as such, which would be impossible unless we were in a position to compare them with the corresponding truths.³ For his own part, Antiochus adopted without alteration the empirical theory of Chrysippus, according to which knowledge is elaborated by reflection out of the elements supplied by sense. His physics were also those of Stoicism with a slight Peripatetic admixture, but without any modification of their purely materialistic character. In ethics he remained truer to the Academic tradition, refusing to follow the Stoics in their absolute isolation of virtue from vice, and of happiness from external circumstances, involving as it did the equality of all transgressions and the worthlessness of worldly goods. But the disciples of the Porch had made such large concessions to common sense by their theories of preference and of progress, that even here there was very little left to distinguish his teaching from theirs.⁴

Meanwhile a series of Stoic thinkers had also been feeling their way towards a compromise with Plato and Aristotle, which, so far as it went, was a step in the direction of spiritualism. We have seen, in a former chapter, how one of the great distinguishing marks of Stoicism, as compared with the systems immediately preceding it, was the substitution of a pervading monism for their antithesis between God and the world, between

¹ Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

² *Ibid.*, p. 603.

³ For the authorities see Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 599–601.

⁴ Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 603–8. As to the metaphysics of Antiochus it seems to me that Cicero's evidence (*Acad.*, i., 6–7) proves that he was a materialist.

heaven and earth, between reason and sense. It will be remembered also that this monistic creed was associated with a return to the Heracleitean theory that the world is periodically destroyed by fire. Now, with reference to three out of these four points, Boëthus, a Stoic contemporary of Carneades, returned to the Aristotelian doctrine. While still holding to the materialism of his own school, including a belief in the corporeal nature of the divinity, he separated God from the world, and represented him as governing its movements from without; the world itself he maintained to be eternal; and in the mind of man he recognised reason or nous as an independent source of conviction. In his cosmology, Boëthus was followed by a more celebrated master, Panaetius, who also adopted the Aristotelian rationalism so far as to deny the continued existence of the soul after death, and to repudiate the belief in divination which Stoicism had borrowed from popular superstition; while in psychology he partially restored the distinction between life and mind which had been obliterated by his predecessors.¹ The dualistic theory of mind was carried still further by Posidonius, the most eminent Stoic of the first century B.C. This very learned and accomplished master, while returning in other points to a stricter orthodoxy, was led to admit the Platonic distinction between reason and passion, and to make it the basis of his ethical system.² But the Platonising tendencies of Posidonius had no more power than those of Antiochus to effect a true spiritualistic revival, since neither they nor any of their contemporaries had any genius for metaphysical speculation; while the increased attention paid to Aristotle did not extend to the fundamental principles of his system, which, even within the Peripatetic school, were so misconceived as to be interpreted in a thoroughly materialistic sense.³

A distinct parallelism may be traced in the lines of evolution along which we have accompanied our two opposing schools. While the Academicians were coming over to the Stoic theory of cognition, the Stoics themselves were moving in the same general direction, and seeking for an external reality more in consonance with their notions of certainty than the philosophy of their first teachers could supply. For, as originally constituted, Stoicism included a large element of scepticism, which must often have laid its advocates open to the charge of inconsistency from those who accepted the same principle in a more undiluted form. The Heracleitean flux adopted by Zeno as the physical basis of his system, was much better suited to a sceptical than to a dogmatic philosophy, as the use to which it was put by Protagoras and Plato

¹ Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 554, 561 *sqq.*

² Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 575

³ Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 624, note 1.

sufficiently proved; and this was probably the reason why Boëthus and Panaetius partially discarded it in favour of a more stable cosmology. The dialectical studies of the school also tended to suggest more difficulties than they could remove. The comprehensive systematisation of Chrysippus, like that of Plato and Aristotle, had for its object the illustration of each topic from every point of view, and especially from the negative as well as from the positive side. The consequence was that his indefatigable erudition had collected a great number of logical puzzles which he had either neglected or found himself unable to solve. There would, therefore, be a growing inclination to substitute a literary and rhetorical for a logical training: and as we shall presently see, there was an extraneous influence acting in the same direction. Finally, the rigour of Stoic morality had been strained to such a pitch that its professors were driven to admit the complete ideality of virtue. Their sage had never shown himself on earth, at least within the historical period; and the whole world of human interests being, from the rational point of view, either a delusion or a failure, stood in permanent contradiction to their optimistic theory of nature. The Sceptics were quite aware of this practical approximation to their own views, and sometimes took advantage of it to turn the tables on their opponents with telling effect. Thus, on the occasion of that philosophical embassy with an account of which the present chapter began, when a noble Roman playfully observed to Carneades, 'You must think that I am not a Praetor as I am not a sage, and that Rome is neither a city nor a state,' the great Sceptic replied, turning to his colleague Diogenes, 'That is what my Stoic friend here would say.'¹ And Plutarch, in two sharp attacks on the Stoics, written from the Academic point of view, and probably compiled from documents of a much earlier period,² charges them with outraging common sense by their wholesale practical negations, to at least as great an extent as the Sceptics outraged it by their suspense of judgment. How the ethical system of Stoicism was modified so as to meet these criticisms has been related in a former chapter; and we have just seen how Posidonius, by his partial return to the Platonic psychology, with its division between reason and impulse, contributed to a still further change in the same conciliatory sense.

VII

We have now reached a point in history where the Greek intellect seems to be struck with a partial paralysis, continuing

¹ Cic., *Acad.*, ii., 45.

² The treatises entitled *De Stoicorum Repugnantia* and *De Communibus Notitiis*.

for a century and a half. During that period, its activity—what there is of it—is shown only in criticism and erudition. There is learning, there is research, there is acuteness, there is even good taste, but originality and eloquence are extinct. The cause of this intellectual failure must be looked for in the political history of the time, and more especially in the military events from the capture of Corinth in 146 B.C. to the battle of Actium B.C. 31—of which the most disastrous for Greece was the storming of Athens by Sulla B.C. 86—with consequences that must have long continued to make themselves felt. Is it a coincidence, or is it something more, that this interval of sterility should occur simultaneously with the most splendid period of Latin literature, and that the new birth of Greek culture should be followed by the decrepitude and death of the Latin muse? It is certain that in modern Europe, possessing as it does so many independent sources of vitality, the flowering-times of different countries rarely coincide; England and Spain, from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, being the only instances that I can recall of two countries almost simultaneously reaching the highest point of their literary development. Possibly, during the great age of Latin literature, all the most aspiring Greeks found employment as tutors in Roman families; while the reading public of the West were too much absorbed by the masterpieces composed in their own language, or too elated with the consciousness of a new superiority, to encourage the rivalry of those from whom they had wrested not only political independence, but also, what till then had never been disputed with the Greeks, supreme dominion in the world of mind. It is, at any rate, significant that while Greek was the favourite language of Roman lovers in the time of Lucretius and again in the time of Juvenal, there are no allusions to its having been employed by them during the intermediate period.¹ Be this as it may, from the fall of the Republic to the time of Trajan, philosophy, like poetry and eloquence—or at least all philosophy that was positive and practical—became domiciled in Rome, and received the stamp of the Roman character. How Stoicism was affected by the change has been pointed out in a former chapter. What we have now to study is chiefly the reaction of Rome on the Greek mind, and its bearing on the subsequent development of thought.

This reaction had begun to make itself felt long before the birth of a philosophical literature in the Latin language. It may be traced to the time when the lecture-halls at Athens were first visited by Roman students, and Greek professors first received on terms of intimate companionship into the houses of

¹ Lucret., iv., 1160-69; Juven., vi., 186-95.

Roman nobles. In each instance, but more especially in the latter, not only would the pupil imbibe new ideas from the master, but the master would suit his teaching to the tastes and capacities of the pupil. The result would be an intellectual condition somewhat resembling that which attended the popularisation of philosophy in Athens during the latter half of the fifth century B.C.; and all the more so as speculation had already spontaneously reverted to the Sophistic standpoint. The parallel will be still more complete if we take the word Sophist in its original and comprehensive sense. We may then say that while Carneades, with his entrancing eloquence and his readiness to argue both sides of a question, was the Protagoras of the new movement; Panaetius, the dignified rationalist and honoured friend of Laelius and the younger Scipio, its Prodicus; and Posidonius, the astronomer and encyclopaedic scholar, its Hippias, Phaedrus the Epicurean was its Anaxagoras or Democritus.

The Epicurean philosophy was, in fact, the first to gain a footing in Rome; and it thereby acquired a position of comparative equality with the other schools, to which it was not really entitled, but which it has ever since succeeded in maintaining. The new doctrine fell like a spark on a mass of combustible material. The Romans were full of curiosity about nature and her workings; full of contempt for the degrading Etruscan superstitions that hampered them at every turn, and the falsity of which was proving too much even for the official gravity of their state-appointed interpreters; full of impatience at the Greek mythology which was beginning to substitute itself for the severe abstractions of their own more spiritual faith;¹ full of loathing for the Asiatic orgies which were being introduced into the highest society of their own city. Epicureanism offered them a complete and easily intelligible theory of the world, which at the same time came as a deliverance from supernatural terrors. The consequence was that its different parts were thrown out of perspective, and their relative importance almost reversed. Originally framed as an ethical system with certain physical and theological implications, it was interpreted by Lucretius, and apparently also by his Roman predecessors,² as a scientific and anti-religious system, with certain references to conduct neither very prominently brought forward nor very distinctly conceived. Nor was this change of front limited to Epicureanism, if, as we may suspect, the rationalistic direction

¹ Varro observes that for 170 years the ancient Romans worshipped their gods without images; 'quod si adhuc,' inquit, 'mansisset castius Diis observarentur.' And in the same passage, speaking of mythology, he says, 'hoc omnia Diis attribuuntur quae non modo in hominem, sed etiam in contemptissimum hominem cadere possunt.' Augustin., *De Civit. Dei*, vi., 5.

² Woltjer, *Lucretii Philosophia*, p. 5.

taken by Panaetius was due, at least in part, to a similar demand on the side of his Roman admirers.

But what had happened once before when philosophy was taken up by men of the world, repeated itself on this occasion. Attention was diverted from speculative to ethical problems, or at least to issues lying on the borderland between speculation and practice, such as those relating to the criterion of truth and the nature of the highest good. On neither of these topics had Epicureanism a consistent answer to give, especially when subjected to the cross-examination of rival schools eager to secure Roman favour for their own doctrines. Stated under any form, the Epicurean morality could not long satisfy the conquerors of the world. To some of them it would seem a shameful dereliction of duty, to others an irksome restraint on self-indulgence, while all would be alienated by its declared contempt for the general interests of culture and ambition. Add to this that the slightest acquaintance with astronomy, as it was then taught in Hellenic countries, would be fatal to a belief in the Epicurean physics, and we shall understand that the cause for which Lucretius contended was already lost before his great poem saw the light.

The requirements which Epicureanism failed to meet, were, to a great extent, satisfied by Stoicism. This philosophy had, from a comparatively early period, won the favour of a select class, but had been temporarily overshadowed by the popularity of its hedonistic and anti-religious rival, when a knowledge of the Greek systems first became diffused through Italy. The uncouth language of the early Stoics and the apparently unpractical character of their theories doubtless exercised a repellent effect on many who were not out of sympathy with their general spirit. These difficulties were overcome first by Panaetius, and then, to a still greater extent, by Posidonius, the elder contemporary and friend of Pompeius and Cicero, who was remarkable not only for his enormous learning but also for his oratorical talent.¹ It seems probable that the lessons of this distinguished man marked the beginning of that religious reaction which eventually carried all before it. We have already seen how he abandoned the rationalistic direction struck out by his predecessor, Panaetius; and his return to the old Stoic orthodoxy may very well have responded to a revival of religious feeling among the educated Roman public, who by this time must have discovered that there were other ways of escaping from superstition besides a complete rejection of the supernatural.

¹ The services of Posidonius seem to have been overlooked by Gaston Boissier when he implies in his work on Roman Religion (vol. ii., p. 11) that Fabianus, a Roman declaimer under Augustus, was the first to give an eloquent expression to Stoicism (see Zeller, p. 577).

The triumph of Stoicism was, however, retarded by the combined influence of the Academic and Peripatetic schools. Both claimed the theory of a morality founded on natural law as a doctrine of their own, borrowed from them without acknowledgment by the Porch, and restated under an offensively paradoxical form. To a Roman, the Academy would offer the further attraction of complete immunity from the bondage of a speculative system, freedom of enquiry limited only by the exigencies of practical life, and a conveniently elastic interpretation of the extent to which popular faiths might be accepted as true. If absolute suspense of judgment jarred on his moral convictions, it was ready with accommodations and concessions. We have seen how the scepticism of Carneades was first modified by Philo, and then openly renounced by Philo's successor, Antiochus. Roman influence may have been at work with both; for Philo spent some time in the capital of the empire, whither he was driven by the events of the first Mithridatic War; while Antiochus was the friend of Lucullus and the teacher of Cicero.¹

VIII

The greatest of Roman orators and writers was also the first Roman that held opinions of his own in philosophy. How much original thought occurs in his voluminous contributions to the literature of the subject is more than we can determine, the Greek authorities on which he drew being known almost exclusively through the references to them contained in his disquisitions. But, judging from the evidence before us, carefully sifted as it has been by German scholars, one would feel disposed to assign him a foremost rank among the thinkers of an age certainly not distinguished either for fertility or for depth of thought. It seems clear that he gave a new basis to the eclectic tendencies of his contemporaries, and that this basis was subsequently accepted by other philosophers whose speculative capacity has never been questioned. Cicero describes himself as an adherent of the New Academy, and expressly claims to have reasserted its principles after they had fallen into neglect among the Greeks, more particularly as against his own old master Antiochus, whose Stoicising theory of cognition he repudiates as an illogical departure from Philo's teaching.² Like Philo also, he bases certainty on the twofold ground of a moral necessity for acting on our beliefs,³ and the existence of moral intuitions, or natural tendencies to believe in the mind itself;⁴ or, perhaps, more properly speaking, on the

¹ Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 597-8.

³ *Ibid.*, 31, 99.

² *Acad.*, ii., 22.

⁴ *De Fin.*, v. 21, 59.

single ground of a moral sense. This, as already stated, was unquestionably a reproduction of the Platonic ideas under their subjective aspect. But in his general views about the nature and limits of human knowledge, Cicero leaves the Academy behind him, and goes back to Socrates. Perhaps no two men of great genius could be more unlike than these two,—for us the most living figures in ancient history if not in all history,—the Roman being as much a type of time-servingness and vacillation as the Athenian was of consistency and resolute independence. Yet, in its mere external results, the philosophy of Socrates is perhaps more faithfully reproduced by Cicero than by any subsequent enquirer; and the differences between them are easily accounted for by the long interval separating their ages from one another. Each set out with the same eager desire to collect knowledge from every quarter; each sought above all things for that kind of knowledge which seemed to be of the greatest practical importance; and each was led to believe that this did not include speculations relating to the physical world; one great motive to the partial scepticism professed by both being the irreconcilable disagreement of those who had attempted an explanation of its mysteries. The deeper ground of man's ignorance in this respect was stated somewhat differently by each; or perhaps we should say that the same reason is expressed in a mythical form by the one and in a scientific form by the other. Socrates held that the nature of things is a secret which the gods have reserved for themselves; while, in Cicero's opinion, the heavens are so remote, the interior of the earth so dark, the mechanism of our own bodies so complicated and subtle, as to be placed beyond the reach of fruitful observation.¹ Nor did this deprivation seem any great hardship to either, since, as citizens of great and free states, both were pre-eminently interested in the study of social life; and it is characteristic of their common tendency that both should have been not only great talkers and observers but also great readers of ancient literature.²

With regard to ethics, there is, of course, a great difference between the innovating, creative genius of the Greek and the receptive but timid intelligence of the Roman. Yet the uncertainty which, in the one case, was due to the absence of any fixed system, is equally present in the other, owing to the embarrassment of having so many systems among which to choose. Three ethical motives were constantly present to the thoughts of Socrates: the utility of virtue, from a material point of view, to the individual; its social necessity; and its

¹ *Acad.*, ii., 39.

² For the literary studies of Socrates, see Xenoph., *Mem.*, i., 6, 14; those of Cicero are too manifest to need any special reference.

connexion with the dual constitution of man as a being composed of two elements whereof the one is infinitely superior to the other; but he never was able, or never attempted to co-ordinate them under a single principle. His successors tried to discover such a principle in the idea of natural law, but could neither establish nor apply it in a satisfactory manner. Cicero reproduces the Socratic elements, sometimes in their original dispersion and confusion, sometimes with the additional complication and perplexity introduced by the idea through which it had been hoped to systematise and reconcile them. To him, indeed, that idea was even more important than to the Greek moralists; for he looked on nature as the common ground where philosophy and untrained experience might meet for mutual confirmation and support.¹ We have seen how he adopted the theory—as yet not very clearly formulated—of a moral sense, or general faculty of intuition, from Philo. To study and obey the dictates of this faculty, as distinguished from the depraving influence of custom, was his method of arriving at truth and right. But if, when properly consulted, it always gave the same response, a similar unanimity might be expected in the doctrines of the various philosophical schools; and the adhesion of Academicians, Peripatetics, and Stoics to the precept, Follow nature, seemed to demonstrate that such an agreement actually existed. Hence Cicero over and over again labours to prove that their disputes were merely verbal, and that Stoicism in particular had borrowed its ethics wholesale from his own favourite sect. Yet from time to time their discrepancies would force themselves on his notice; and by none have the differences separating Stoicism from its rivals been stated with more clearness, concision, and point.² These relate to the absolute self-sufficingness of virtue, its unity, and the incompatibility of emotion with its exercise. But Cicero seems to have regarded the theory of preference and rejection as a concession to common sense amounting to a surrender of whatever was paradoxical and exclusive in the Stoic standpoint.³ And with respect to the question round which controversy raged most fiercely, namely, whether virtue was the sole or merely the chief condition of happiness, Cicero, as a man of the world, considered that it was practically of no consequence which side prevailed.⁴ It would be unfair to blame him for not seeing, what the stricter school felt rather than saw, that the happiness associated with goodness was not of an individual but of a social character, and therefore could not properly be compared with objects of purely individual desire, such as health, wealth, friends, and worldly fame.

¹ See the passages quoted by Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 659–60.

² *Acad.*, i., 10.

³ *De Fin.*, iv., 8.

⁴ *De Off.*, iii., 3, II.

But even taken in its mildest form, there were difficulties about Greek idealism which still remained unsolved. They may be summed up in one word, the necessity of subordinating all personal and passionate feelings to a higher law, whatever the dictates of that law may be. Of such self-suppression few men were less capable than Cicero. Whether virtue meant the extirpation or merely the moderation of desire and emotion, it was equally impossible to one of whom Macaulay has said, with not much more severity than truth, that his whole soul was under the dominion of a girlish vanity and a craven fear.¹ Such weak and well-intentioned natures almost always take refuge from their sorrows and self-reproaches in religion; and probably the religious sentiment was more highly developed in Cicero than in any other thinker of the age. Here also a parallel with Socrates naturally suggests itself. The relation between the two amounts to more than a mere analogy; for not only was the intellectual condition of old Athens repeating itself in Rome, but the religious opinions of all cultivated Romans who still retained their belief in a providential God, were, to an even greater extent than their ethics, derived through Stoicism from the great founder of rational theology. Cicero, like Socrates, views God under the threefold aspect of a creator, a providence, and an informing spirit:—identical in his nature with the soul of man, and having man for his peculiar care. With regard to the evidence of his existence, the teleological argument derived from the structure of organised beings is common to both; the argument from universal belief, doubtless a powerful motive with Socrates, is more distinctly put forward by Cicero; and while both regard the heavenly luminaries as manifest embodiments of the divine essence, Cicero is led by the traditions of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, to present the regularity of their movements as the most convincing revelation of a superhuman intelligence, and to identify the outermost starry sphere with the highest God of all. Intimately associated with this view is his belief in the immortality of the soul, which he supposes will return after death to the eternal and unchangeable sphere whence it originally proceeded.² But his familiarity with the sceptical arguments of Carneades prevented Cicero from putting forward his theological beliefs with the same confidence as Socrates; while, at the same time, it enabled him to take up a much more decided attitude of hostility towards the popular superstitions from which he was anxious, so far as possible, to purify true religion.³ To sum up: Cicero, like Kant, seems to

¹ The passage occurs near the beginning of his Essay on Bacon.

² See the *Somnium Scipionis*, *De Repub.*, vi., 18 sqq.

³ *De Divin.*, ii., 72, 48; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 667 sq. However, as regards a future life compare *Pro Cluentio*, 61.

have been chiefly impressed by two phenomena, the starry heavens without and the moral law within ; each in its own way giving him the idea of unchanging and everlasting continuance, and both testifying to the existence of a power by which all things are regulated for the best. But the materialism of his age naturally prevented him from regarding the external order as a mere reflex or lower manifestation of the inward law by which all spirits feel themselves to be members of the same intelligible community.

I have illustrated the position of Cicero by reference to the master who, more than any other Greek philosopher, seems to have satisfied his ideal of perfect wisdom. I must now observe that nothing is better calculated to show how inadequate was the view once universally taken of Socrates, and still, perhaps, taken by all who are not scholars, than that it should be applicable in so many points to Cicero as well. For, while the influence of the one on human thought was the greatest ever exercised by a single individual, the influence of the other was limited to the acceleration of a movement already in full activity, and moreover tending on the whole in a retrograde direction. The immeasurable superiority of the Athenian lies in his dialectical method. It was not by a mere elimination of differences that he hoped to establish a general agreement, but by reasoning down from admitted principles, which were themselves to be the result of scientific induction brought to bear on a comprehensive and ever-widening area of experience. Hence his scepticism, which was directed against authority, tended as much to stimulate enquiry as that of the Roman declaimer, which was directed against reason, tended to deaden or to depress it. Hence, also, the political philosophy of Socrates was as revolutionary as that of his imitator was conservative. Both were, in a certain sense, aristocrats ; but while the aristocracy of the elegant rhetorician meant a clique of indolent and incapable nobles, that of the sturdy craftsman meant a band of highly-trained specialists maintained in power by the choice, the confidence, and the willing obedience of an intelligent people. And while the religion of Cicero was a blind reliance on providence supplemented by priestcraft in this world, with the hope, if things came to the worst, of a safe retreat from trouble in the next ; the religion of Socrates was an active co-operation with the universal mind, an attempt to make reason and the will of God prevail on earth, with the hope, if there was any future state, of carrying on in it the intellectual warfare which alone had made life worth living here. No less a contrast could be expected between the orator who turned to philosophy only for the occupation of a leisure hour, or for relief from the pangs of disappointed ambition, and

the thinker who gave her his whole existence as the elect apostle and martyr of her creed.

IX

We have seen what was the guiding principle of Cicero's philosophical method. By interrogating all the systems of his time, he hoped to elicit their points of agreement, and to utilise the result for the practical purposes of life. As actually applied, the effect of this method was not to reconcile the current theories with one another, nor yet to lay the foundation of a more comprehensive philosophy, but to throw back thought on an order of ideas which, from their great popularity, had been incorporated with every system in turn, and, for that very reason, seemed to embody the precise points on which all were agreed. These were the idea of nature, the idea of mind or reason, and the idea of utility. We have frequently come across them in the course of the present work. Here it will suffice to recall the fact that they had been first raised to distinct consciousness when the results of early Greek thought were brought into contact with the experiences of Greek life, and more especially of Athenian life, in the age of Pericles. As originally understood, they gave rise to many complications and cross divisions, arising from what was considered to be their mutual incompatibility or equivalence. Thus nature was openly rejected by the sceptical Sophists, ignored by Socrates, and, during a long period of his career, treated with very little respect by Plato; reason, in its more elaborate forms, was slighted by the Cynics, and employed for its own destruction by the Megarians, in both cases as an enemy to utility; while to Aristotle the pure exercise of reason was the highest utility of all, and nature only a lower manifestation of the same idealising process. At a later period, we find nature accepted as a watchword by Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics alike, although, of course, each attached a widely different meaning to the term; the supremacy of reason, without whose aid, indeed, their controversies could not have been carried on is recognised with similar unanimity; and each sect lays exclusive stress on the connexion of its principles with human happiness, thus making utility the foremost consideration in philosophy. Consequently, to whatever system a Roman turned, he would recognise the three great regulative conceptions of Greek thought, although frequently enveloped in a network of fine-spun distinctions and inferences which to him must have seemed neither natural nor reasonable nor useful. On the other hand, apart from such subtleties, he could readily translate all three into terms which seemed to show that,

so far from being divided by any essential incompatibility, they did but represent different aspects of a single harmonious ideal. Nature meant simplicity, orderliness, universality, and the spontaneous consentience of unsophisticated minds. Reason meant human dignity, especially as manifested in the conquest of fear and of desire. And whatever was natural and reasonable seemed to satisfy the requirements of utility as well. It might seem also that these very principles were embodied in the facts of old Roman life and of Rome's imperial destiny. The only question was which school of Greek philosophy gave them their clearest and completest interpretation. Lucretius would have said that it was the system of Epicurus; but such a misconception was only rendered possible by the poet's seclusion from imperial interests, and, apparently, by his unacquaintance with the more refined forms of Hellenic thought. Rome could not find in Epicureanism the comprehensiveness, the cohesion, and the power which marked her own character, and which she only required to have expressed under a speculative form. Then came Cicero, with his modernised rhetorical version of what he conceived to be the Socratic philosophy. His teaching was far better suited than that of his great contemporary to the tastes of his countrymen, and probably contributed in no small degree to the subsequent discredit of Epicureanism; yet, by a strange irony, it told, to the same extent, in favour of a philosophy from which Cicero himself was probably even more averse than from the morality of the Garden. In his hands, the Academic criticism had simply the effect of dissolving away those elements which distinguished Stoicism from Cynicism; while his eclecticism brought into view certain principles more characteristic of the Cynics than of any other sect. The nature to whose guidance he constantly appeals was, properly speaking, not a Socratic but a Sophistic or Cynic idea; and when the Stoics appropriated it, they were only reclaiming an ancestral possession. The exclusion of theoretical studies and dialectical subtleties from philosophy was also Cynic; the Stoic theology when purified, as Cicero desired that it should be purified, from its superstitious ingredients, was no other than the naturalistic monotheism of Antisthenes; and the Stoic morality without its paradoxes was little more than an ennobled Cynicism. The curve described by thought was determined by forces of almost mechanical simplicity. The Greek Eclectics, seeking a middle term between the Academy and the Porch, had fallen back on Plato; Cicero, pursuing the same direction, receded to Socrates; but the continued attraction of Stoicism drew him to a point where the two were linked together by their historical intermediary, the Cynic school. And, by a singular coincidence,

the primal forms of Roman life, half godlike and half brutal, were found, better than anything in Hellenic experience, to realise the ideal of a sect which had taken Heracles for its patron saint. Had Diogenes searched the Roman Forum of his own time, he would have met with a man at every step.

Meanwhile the morality of Stoicism had enlisted a force of incalculable importance on its behalf. This was the life and death of the younger Cato. However narrow his intellect, however impracticable his principles, however hopeless his resistance to the course of history, Cato had merits which in the eyes of his countrymen placed him even higher than Caesar¹; and this impression was probably strengthened by the extraordinary want of tact which the great conqueror showed when he insulted the memory of his noblest foe. Pure in an age of corruption, disinterested in an age of greed, devotedly patriotic in an age of selfish ambition, faithful unto death in an age of shameless tergiversation, and withal of singularly mild and gentle character, Cato lived and died for the law of conscience, proving by his example that if a revival of old Roman virtue were still possible, only through the lessons of Greek philosophy could this miracle be wrought. And it was equally clear that Rome could only accept philosophy under a form harmonising with her ancient traditions, and embodying doctrines like those which the martyred saint of her republican liberties had professed.

The Roman reformers were satisfied to call themselves Stoics; and, in reviewing the Stoic system, we saw to what an extent they welcomed and developed some of its fundamental thoughts. But we have now to add that the current which bore them on had its source deeper down than the elaborate combinations of Zeno and Chrysippus, and entered into the composition of every other system that acted on the Roman intellect simultaneously with theirs. Thus whatever forces co-operated with Stoicism had the effect not of complicating but of simplifying its tendencies, by bringing into exclusive prominence the original impulse whence they sprang, which was the idea of Natural Law. Hence the form ultimately assumed by Roman thought was a philosophy of nature, sometimes appearing more under a Stoic, and sometimes more under a Cynic guise. Everything in Roman poetry that is not copied from Greek models or inspired by Italian passion—in other words, its didactic, descriptive, and satiric elements—may be traced to this philosophy. Doubtless the inculcation of useful arts, the delight in beautiful scenery, the praises of rustic simplicity, the fierce protests against vice under all its forms, and the celebration of an imperial destiny, which form the

¹ 'Sane vel Caesare major,' are Martial's words.

staple of Rome's national literature, spring from her own deepest life; but the quickening power of Greek thought was needed to develop them into articulate expression.

There is, indeed, nothing more nobly characteristic of the Hellenic spirit, especially as organised by Socrates, than its capacity not only for communicating, but for awakening ideas; thus enabling all the nations among which it spread to realise the whole potential treasure of theoretical and practical energy with which they were endowed. As I have said elsewhere, 'the universal diffusion of Greek ideas in the Hellenistic period did not mean, what the diffusion of French and English ideas too often has meant, the effacement of national differences, the world-wide triumph of a single not very elevated standard of opinion, taste, and manners. On the contrary, what was vital and original everywhere sprang up into rejuvenated activity under that electric stimulus. At the contact of Alexander's armies all India united herself under a single chief; and, as a consequence of that union, Buddhism was carried in triumph from the Himalayas to Ceylon. Persia recovered much of her ancient energy, and her religion first received a literary expression under her philhellenic Parthian kings. Judaea, while clinging more passionately than ever to the Thora, felt her imagination swept by a new whirlwind of apocalyptic visions. A series of colossal temples rose along the banks of the Nile, reared by the munificence of the Ptolemies, as if to show that the land they ruled was Egypt for the Egyptians even more than Egypt for the Greeks. After the visit of a single Spartan general Carthage enters on the most heroic period of her existence.'¹ And, from this point of view, we may say that what seems most distinctively proper to Rome—the triumphant consciousness of herself as a world-conquering and world-ruling power—came to her from Greece, and under the form of a Greek idea, the idea of providential destiny. It was to make his countrymen understand the fateful character and inevitable march of her empire that Polybius composed his great history; it was also by a half-Greek that the most successful of her early national epics was sung; and when at last her language was wrought into an adequate instrument of literary expression—thanks also to Greek rhetorical teaching,—and the culture of her children had advanced so far that they could venture to compete with the Greeks on their own ground, it was still only under forms suggested by Stoicism that Vergil could rewrite the story of his country's dedication to her predestined task.

That Vergil was acquainted with this philosophy and had accepted some of its principal conclusions is evident from a

¹ *Revaluations*, pp. 43-44.

famous passage in the Sixth *Aeneid*,¹ setting forth the theory of a universal and all-penetrating soul composed of fiery matter, whence the particular souls of men and animals are derived, by a process likened to the scattering and germination of seeds; from another equally famous passage in the Fourth *Eclogue*,² describing the periodical recurrence of events in the same order as before; and also, although to a less extent, from his acceptance of the Stoic astronomy in the *Georgics*;³ a circumstance which, by the way, renders it most unlikely that he looked up to Lucretius as an authority in physical science.⁴ But even apart from this collateral evidence, one can see that the *Aeneid* is a Stoic poem. It is filled with the ideas of mutation and vicissitude overruled by a divinely appointed order; of the prophetic intimations by which that order is revealed; of the obedience to reason by which passion is subdued; and of the faith in divine goodness by which suffering is made easy to be borne. And there are also gleams of that universal humanity familiar to Stoicism, which read to some like an anticipation of the Christian or the modern spirit, but which really resemble them only as earlier manifestations of the same great philosophical movement.

This analogy with subsequent developments is aided, so far as it goes, by the admixture of a certain Platonic element with Vergil's Stoicism, shown chiefly by the references to an antenatal existence of the soul, introduced for the purpose of bringing Rome's future heroes on the scene. This, however, is the last example of an attempt on the part of a Roman writer to combine Plato's teaching with Stoicism.⁵ At a time when the Romans were more conscious of their literary dependence on Greece than was the case after the Augustan age had reached its zenith, they were probably drawn by the beauty of its literary form to study a system which could otherwise interest them but little. Thus, not only is Cicero full of admiration for Plato—as, indeed, might be expected with so highly cultivated a disciple of the Academy—but Cato, according to the well-known story, spent his last hours reading and re-reading the *Phaedo*; and his nephew Brutus also occupied an intermediate position between the Old Academy and the Porch. The Roman love of simplification and archaism induced

¹ l. 724 *sqq.*

² l. 5-7, and 34-36.

³ i. 231-51.

⁴ The very passage (*Georg.*, ii., 475-92) which is supposed to refer to Lucretius contains a line (*frigidus obstiterit circum praeecordia sanguis*) embodying the Stoic theory that the soul has its seat in the heart, and is nourished by a warm exhalation from the blood. See Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, p. 197; H. v. Arnim, *Stoicorum Vet. Fragm.*, i., p. 38.

⁵ Zeller does indeed call Seneca and Marcus Aurelius 'Platonising Stoics' (*Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, p. 236, 3rd. ed.); but the evidence adduced hardly seems to justify the epithet.

subsequent thinkers either to let Platonism drop altogether, or to study those elements in which it differed from the pure naturalistic doctrine under their Pythagorean form. It may even be doubted whether Vergil's psychology is not derived from Pythagoras rather than from Plato; Ovid, so far as he philosophises at all, is unquestionably a follower of the former;¹ and in the moral teaching of the Sextii, who flourished under Augustus, Pythagorean principles are blended with Stoicism.² It is another manifestation of the same effort to grasp every Greek doctrine by its roots, that Horace should proclaim himself the disciple of Aristippus rather than of Epicurus.³ Even he, however, feels himself drawn with advancing years towards the nobler faith which was now carrying all before it.⁴

With Seneca and his contemporaries, Stoicism has shaken itself free from alien ingredients, and has become the accepted creed of the whole republican opposition, being especially pronounced in the writings of the two young poets, Persius and Lucan. But in proportion as naturalistic philosophy assumed the form of a protest against vice, luxury, inhumanity, despotism, and degradation, or of an exhortation to welcome death as a deliverance from those evils, in the same proportion did it tend to fall back into simple Cynicism; and on this side also it found a ready response, not only in the heroic fortitude, but also in the brutal coarseness and scurrility of the Roman character. Hence the *Satires* of the last great Roman poet, Juvenal, are an even more distinct expression of Cynic than the epic of Vergil had been of Stoic sentiment. Along with whatever was good and wholesome in Cynicism there is the shameless indecency of the Cynics, and their unquestioning acceptance of mendicancy and prostitution as convenient helps to leading a natural and easily contented life. And it may be noticed that the free-thinking tendencies which distinguished the Cynics from the Stoics are also displayed in Juvenal's occasional denunciations of superstition.

X

Thus the final effect of its communion with the Roman mind was not so much to develop Greek philosophy any further, or to reconcile its warring sects with one another, as to aid

¹ *Metamorph.*, xv., 60.

² Zeller, *ut supra*, p. 681.

³ *Epp.*, i. 1., 18.

⁴ Gaston Boissier (*Religion Romaine*, i., p. 206), on the strength of a passage in one of Horace's *Satires* (ii., 3, 11), where the poet speaks of carrying Plato about with him on his travels, infers that the study of the *Dialogues* had a good deal to do with his conversion. It is, however, more than probable that the Plato mentioned is not the philosopher, but the comic poet, for we find that his companions in Horace's trunk were Menander, Eupolis, and Archilochus.

in their decomposition by throwing them back on the earlier forms whence they had sprung. Accordingly we find that the philosophic activity of Hellas immediately before and after the Christian era—so far as there was any at all—consisted in a revival of the Pythagorean and Cynic schools, accompanied by a corresponding resuscitation of primitive Scepticism. This last takes the shape of a very distinct protest against the fashionable naturalism of the age, just as the scepticism of Protagoras and Gorgias—if my view be correct—had once been called forth by the naturalism of Prodicus and Hippias. The principal representative, if not the founder, of Neo-Scepticism was Aenesidêmus, who taught in Alexandria, when we are not informed, but probably after the middle of the first century A.D.¹ An avowed disciple of Pyrrho, his object was to reassert the sceptical principle in its original purity, especially as against the Academicians, whom he charged with having first perverted and then completely abandoned it.² Aenesidêmus would hear nothing of probabilities nor of moral certainties. He also claimed to distinguish himself from the Academicians by refusing to assert even so much as that nothing can be asserted; but it appears that, in this point, he had been fully anticipated by Arcesilaus and Carneades.³ For the rest, his own Scepticism recalls the method of Gorgias and Protagoras much more distinctly than the method of the New Academy—a fresh illustration of the archaic and revivalist tendencies displayed by philosophy at this period. In other words, it is not against the reasoning processes that his criticisms are directed, but against the theory of causation on the objective side, and against the credibility of our immediate perceptions on the subjective side. But, in both directions, he has worked out the difficulties of the old Sophists with a minuteness and a precision unknown to them; and some of his points have been found worth repeating in a different connexion by modern critics. Thus, in analysing the theory of causation, he draws attention to the plurality of causes as an obstacle to connecting

¹ Zeller is inclined to place Aenesidêmus a hundred years earlier than the date here assigned to him (*Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, p. 9); but two pieces of evidence which he himself quotes seem to militate strongly against this view. One is a statement of Aristocles the Peripatetic, who flourished 160–190 A.D., that Scepticism had been revived not long before his time (*ἐχθὲς καὶ πρόωγ*; *apud* Euseb., *Pr. Ev.*, xiv., 18, 22; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 9); the other is Seneca's question, *Quis est qui tradat praecepta Pyrrhonis?* (*Nat. Quaest.*, vii., 32, 2; Zeller, p. 11). On the other hand, Epictetus, lecturing towards the end of the first century, alludes to Scepticism as something then living and active. The natural inference is that Aenesidêmus flourished before his time and after Seneca, that is about the period mentioned in the text; and I cannot make out that there are any satisfactory data pointing to a different conclusion.

² Zeller, iii., 2, p. 18.

³ Z., iii., 1, pp. 495 and 514; Cic., *Acad.*, i., 12, 45; *ibid.*, ii., 9, 28.

any given consequent with one antecedent more than with another; to the illegitimate assumption that the laws inferred from experience hold good under unknown conditions; to the arbitrary assumption of hypothetical causes not evinced by experience; and to the absurdity of introducing a new difficulty for the purpose of explaining an old one.¹ With regard to causation itself, Aenesidêmus seems to have resolved it into action and reaction, thus eliminating the condition of antecedence and consequence, without which it becomes unintelligible.²

The Alexandrian Sceptic's general arguments against the possibility of knowledge resolve themselves into a criticism of what Sir W. Hamilton called Natural Realism, somewhat complicated and confused by a simultaneous attack on the theory of natural morality conceived as something eternal and immutable. They are summed up in the famous ten Tropes.³ Of these the first three are founded on the conflicting sensations produced by the same object when acting on different animals—as is inferred from the marked contrast presented by their several varieties of origin and structure,—on different men, and on the different senses of the same individual. The fourth, which has evidently an ethical bearing, enlarges on the changes in men's views caused by mental and bodily changes, according to their health, age, disposition, and so forth. The next five Tropes relate to circumstances connected with the objects themselves: their distance and position as regards the spectator, the disturbance produced in their proper action by external influences such as air and light, together with the various membranes and humours composing the organs of sense through which they are apprehended; their quantitative variation, involving as it does opposite effects on the senses, or as with medicines, on the health; the law of relativity, according to which many things are only known when taken in company with others, such as double and half, right and left, whole and part; comparative frequency or rarity of occurrence, as with comets, which, while really of much less importance than the sun, excite much more interest from their being so seldom seen. Finally, the tenth Trope is purely ethical, and infers the non-existence of a fixed moral standard from the divergent and even opposite customs prevailing among different nations.⁴

¹ Sext. Emp., *Pyrrh. Hyp.*, i., 180 sqq.

² *Adv. Math.*, ix., 228.

³ Laert. D., ix., 79-88.

⁴ The ten Tropes were evidently suggested by the ten Categories of Aristotle. The five grounded on differences of disposition, place, quantity, relation, and habits, show at once by their names that they are derived from *κείσθαι*, *ποῦ*, *ποσόν*, *πρός τι*, and *ἔχειν*. The Trope of comparative frequency would be suggested by *πότε*; the disturbing influence of bodies on one another combines *ποιεῖν* and *πάσχειν*; the conflict of the special senses belongs, although somewhat more remotely, to *ποιόν*; and, in order to make up the number ten, *οὐσία*, which answers to the percipient in

In his attacks on the prevalent theories of ethics, Aenesidêmus again reminds us both of Protagoras and of modern agnosticism. According to him, the general disagreement of mankind proves, among other things, that there is no definable highest good—it is neither virtue, nor pleasure, nor knowledge.¹ In the absence of any dogmatic teaching on the subject at the time when he lived, Protagoras could not give an opinion with regard to the *summum bonum*; but Plato's famous dialogue represents him as one who, from his point of view, would be unwilling to admit the possibility of introducing fixed principles into conduct; and in like manner, Herbert Spencer, while accepting the hedonistic principle, gives it such an extremely general signification that he is thrown back on the sceptical principle of leaving every one free to follow his own inclinations, provided that, in so doing, he does not interfere with the liberty of others.

The parallel between Aenesidêmus and Protagoras would become still more complete were it true that the Alexandrian philosopher also sought to base his Scepticism on the Heraclitean theory of nature, arguing that contradictory assertions are necessitated by the presence of contradictory properties in every object.

That Aenesidêmus held this view is stated as a fact by Sextus, whose testimony is here corroborated by Tertullian, or rather by Tertullian's informant, Soranus. We find, however, that Zeller, who formerly accepted the statement in question as true, has latterly seen reason to reject it. Aenesidêmus cannot, he thinks, have been guilty of so great an inconsistency as to base his Scepticism on the dogmatic physics of Heracleitus. And he explains the agreement of the ancient authorities by supposing that the original work of Aenesidêmus contained a critical account of the Heraclitean theory, that this was misinterpreted into an expression of his adhesion to it by Soranus, and that the blunder was adopted at second-hand by both Sextus and Tertullian.²

It is, at any rate, certain that the successors of Aenesidêmus adhered to the standpoint of Pyrrho. One of them, Agrippa, both simplified and strengthened the arguments of the school by reducing the ten Tropes to five.³ The earlier objections to human certainty were summed up under two heads: the irreconcilable conflict of opinions on all subjects; and the

general, had to be divided into the two Tropes taken respectively from the differences among animals and among men,—an arrangement that would occur all the more readily as *οὐσία* included the two notions of Genus and Species, of which the one answers, in this instance, to animals, and the other to men.

¹ Zeller, iii., 2, p. 23.

² Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–37.

³ Laert. D., xi., 88 sq.

essential relativity of consciousness, in which the percipient and the perceived are so intimately united that what things in themselves are cannot possibly be discovered. The other three Tropes relate to the baselessness of reasoning. They were evidently suggested by Aristotle's remarks on the subject. The process of proof cannot be carried backwards *ad infinitum*, nor can it legitimately revolve in a circle. Thus much had already been admitted, or rather insisted on by the great founder of logic. But the Sceptics could not agree to Aristotle's contention, that demonstration may be based on first principles of self-evident certainty. They here fell back on their main argument, that the absence of general agreement on every point is fatal to the existence of such pretended axioms. A still further simplification was effected by the reduction of the five Tropes to two—that all belief rests either on self-evident certainty or on reasoning. But the prevalent disagreements show that nothing is self-evident; while reasoning must either go back to non-existent certainties, or be continued to infinity or move in a circle.¹ As against true science, the sceptical Tropes are powerless, for the validity of its principles has nothing to do with their general acceptance. They are laid before the learner for his instruction, and if he chooses to regard them as either false or doubtful, the misfortune will be his and not theirs. But as against all attempts to constrain belief by an appeal to authority, the Tropes still remain invincible. Whether the testimony invoked be that of ancient traditions or of a supposed inward witness, there is always the same fatal objection that other traditions and other inward witnesses tell quite a different story. The task of deciding between them must, after all, be handed over to an impersonal reason. In other words, each individual must judge for himself and at his own risk, just as he does in questions of physical science.

Scepticism among the ancients was often cultivated in connexion with some positive doctrine which it indirectly served to recommend. In the case of its last supporters, this was the study of medicine on an empirical as opposed to a deductive method. The Sceptical contention is that we cannot go beyond appearances; the empirical contention is, that all knowledge comes to us from experience, and that this only shows us how phenomena are related to one another, not how they are related to their underlying causes, whether efficient or final. These allied points of view have been brought into still more intimate association by modern thought, which has sprung from a modified form of the ancient Scepticism, powerfully aided by a simultaneous development of physical science. At the same time the new school have succeeded in shaking off the

¹ Sext. Emp., *Pyrrh. Hyp.*, i., 178–179; Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 37 and 38.

narrowness and timidity of their predecessors, who were still so far under the influence of the old dogmatists as to believe that there was an inherent opposition between observation and reasoning in the methods of discovery, between facts and explanations in the truths of science, and between antecedence and causation in the realities of nature. In this respect, astronomy has done more for the right adjustment of our conceptions than any other branch of knowledge; and it is remarkable that Sextus Empiricus, the last eminent representative of ancient Scepticism, and the only one (unless Cicero is to be called a Sceptic) whose writings are still extant, should expressly except astronomy from the destructive criticism to which he subjects the whole range of studies included in what we should call the university curriculum of his time.¹ We need not enter into an analysis of the ponderous compilation referred to; for nearly every point of interest which it comprises has already been touched on in the course of this investigation; and Sextus differs only from his predecessors by adding the arguments of the New Academy to those of Protagoras and Pyrrho, thus completing the Sceptical cycle. It will be enough to notice the singular circumstance that so copious and careful an enumeration of the grounds which it was possible to urge against dogmatism—included, as we have seen, many still employed for the same or other purposes,—should have omitted the two most powerful solvents of all. These were left for the exquisite critical acumen of Hume to discover. They relate to the conception of causation, and to the conception of our own personality as an indivisible, continuously existing substance, being attempts to show that both involve assumptions of an illegitimate character. Sextus comes up to the very verge of Hume's objection to the former when he observes that causation implies relation, which can only exist in thought;² but he does not ask how we come to think such a relation, still less does he connect it with the perception of phenomenal antecedence; and his attacks on the various mental faculties assumed by psychologists pass over the fundamental postulate of personal identity, thus leaving Descartes what seemed a safe foundation whereon to rebuild the edifice of metaphysical philosophy.

It remains to add that the Sceptics, notwithstanding their abstinence from coming to a conclusion on questions of morality, in common with all other questions, still claimed the possession of a moral ideal. Borrowing an expression first introduced by Democritus, not himself a Sceptic, they found the highest good in *Ataraxia* (imperturbability) which, according to Pyrrho, followed *Epochê*, that is abstinence from forming an opinion, as

¹ *Adv. Math.*, v., 1.

² *Ibid.*, ix., 208.

its shadow.¹ To be consistent they should have doubted this also; and assuredly were ideals of happiness to be submitted to a general plebiscite none would be rejected by such an overwhelming majority as this.

XI

The effect aimed at by ancient Scepticism under its last form was to throw back reflection on its original starting-point. Life was once more handed over to the guidance of sense, appetite, custom, and art.² We may call this residuum the philosophy of the dinner-bell. That institution implies the feeling of hunger, the directing sensation of sound, the habit of eating together at a fixed time, and the art of determining time by observing the celestial revolutions. Even so limited a view contains indefinite possibilities of expansion. It involves the three fundamental relations that other philosophies have for their object to work out with greater distinctness and in fuller detail: the relation between feeling and action, binding together past present and future in the consciousness of personal identity; the relation of ourselves to a collective society of similarly constituted beings, our intercourse with whom is subject from the very first to laws of morality and of logic; and, finally, the relation in which we stand, both singly and combined, to that universal order by which all alike are enveloped and borne along, with its suggestions of a still larger logic and an august morality springing from the essential dependence of our individual and social selves on an even deeper identity than that which the primary relations immediately reveal. We have already had occasion to observe how the noble teaching of Plato and the Stoics resumes itself in a confession of this threefold synthesis; and we now see how, putting them at their very lowest, nothing less than this will content the claims of thought. Thus, in a shorter time than it took Berkeley to pass from tar-water to the Trinity, we have led our Sceptics from their philosophy of the dinner-bell to a philosophy which the Catholic symbols, with their mythologising tendencies, can but imperfectly represent. And to carry them with us thus far, nothing more than one of their own favourite methods is needed. Wherever they attempt to arrest the progress of enquiry and generalisation, we can show them that no real line of demarcation exists. Let them once admit the idea of a relation connecting the elements of consciousness, and it will carry them over every limit except that which is reached when the universe becomes conscious of itself.

¹ Laert. D., ix., 107.

² These are the four principles enumerated by Sextus, *Pyrrh. Hyp.*, i., 24.

Let them deny the idea of a relation, and we may safely leave them to the endless task of analysing consciousness into elements which are feelings and nothing more. The magician in the story got rid of a too importunate familiar by setting him to spin ropes of sand. The spirit of Scepticism is exorcised by setting it to divide the strands of reason into breadthless lines and unextended points.

What influence Scepticism exercised on the subsequent course of Greek thought is difficult to determine. If we are to believe Laertius Diogenes, who flourished in the second quarter of the third century A.D., every school except Epicureanism had at that time sunk into utter neglect;¹ and it is natural to connect this catastrophe with the activity of the Sceptics, and especially of Sextus Empiricus, whose critical compilation had appeared not long before. Such a conclusion would be supported by the circumstance that Lucian, writing more than fifty years earlier, directs his attacks on contemporary philosophy chiefly from the Sceptical standpoint; his *Hermotimus* in particular being a popularised version of the chief difficulties raised from that quarter. Still it remains to be shown why the criticism of the Greek Humanists, of Pyrrho, and of the New Academy should have produced so much more powerful an effect under their revived form than when they were first promulgated; and it may be asked whether the decline of philosophy should not rather be attributed to the general barbarisation of the Roman empire at that period.

We have also to consider in what relation the new Scepticism stood to the new Platonism by which, in common with every other school, it was eventually either displaced or absorbed. The answer usually given to this question is that the one was a reaction from the other. It is said that philosophy, in despair of being able to discover truth by reason, took refuge in the doctrine that it could be attained by supernatural revelation; and that this doctrine is the characteristic mark distinguishing the system of Plotinus from its predecessors. That a belief in the possibility of receiving divine communications was widely diffused during the last centuries of polytheism is, no doubt, established, but that it ever formed more than an adjunct to Neo-Platonism seems questionable; and, so far as I am aware, there is no evidence to show that it was occasioned by a reaction from Scepticism. As a defence against the arguments of Pyrrho and his successors, it would, in truth, have been quite unavailing; for whatever objections applied to men's natural perceptions, would have applied with still greater force to the alleged

¹ Laert. D., x., 9.

supernatural revelation. Moreover, the mystical element of Neo-Platonism appears only in its consummation—in the ultimate union of the individual soul with the absolute One; the rest of the system being reasoned out in accordance with the ordinary laws of logic, and in apparent disregard of the Sceptical attacks on their validity.

The truth is that critics seem to have been misled by a superficial analogy between the spiritualistic revival accomplished by Plotinus, and the Romantic revival which marked the beginning of the nineteenth century. The two movements have, no doubt, several traits in common; but there is this great difference between them, that the latter was, what the former was not, a reaction against individualism, agnosticism, and religious unbelief. The right analogy will be found not by looking forward but by looking back. It will then be seen that the Neo-Platonists were what their traditional name implies, disciples of Plato, and not only of Plato but of Aristotle as well. They stood in the same relation to the systems which they opposed as that in which the two great founders of spiritualism had stood to the naturalistic and humanist schools of their time—of course with whatever modifications of a common standpoint were necessitated by the substitution of a declining for a progressive civilisation. Like Plato also, they were profoundly influenced by the Pythagorean philosophy, with its curious combination of mystical asceticism and mathematics. And, to complete the analogy, they too found themselves in presence of a powerful religious reaction, against the excesses of which, like him, they at first protested, although with less than his authority, and only, like him, to be at last carried away by its resistless torrent. It is to the study of this religious movement that we must now address ourselves, before entering on an examination of the latest form assumed by Greek philosophy among the Greeks themselves.

Note.—It does not enter into the plan of this work to study the educational and social aspects of Greek philosophy under the Roman Empire. Those who wish for information on the subject should consult Capes's *Stoicism*, Martha's *Moralistes sous l'Empire Romain*, Renan's *Marc-Aurèle*, chap. iii., Aubertin's *Sénèque et Saint Paul*, Havet's *Christianisme et ses Origines*, vol. ii., Gaston Boissier's *Religion Romaine*, Duruy's *Histoire Romaine*, chap. lxi., Friedländer's *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Rom's*, vol. iii., chap. v. (5th ed.), Bruno Bauer's *Christus und die Cäsaren*, and Dill's *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

I

THE result of modern enquiries into the state of civilisation under the Roman Empire during the first two centuries of its existence, has been to suggest conclusions in many respects at variance with those formerly entertained. Instead of the intellectual stagnation, the moral turpitude, and the religious indifference which were once supposed to have been the most marked characteristics of that period, more recent scholars discern symptoms of active and fruitful thought, of purity and disinterestedness both in public and private life, but above all of a religious feeling which erred far more on the side of excess than on the side of defect. This change of view may be traced to various causes. A new class of investigators have made ancient history an object of special study. Fresh evidence has been brought to light, and a more discriminating as well as a more extended use has been made of the sources already available. And, perhaps, even greater importance is attributable to the principle now so generally accepted, that historical phenomena, like all other phenomena, are essentially continuous in their movement. The old theories assumed that the substitution of Christian for what is called Pagan civilisation was accompanied by a sudden break in men's habits and ideas. But the whole spirit of modern philosophy has prepared us to believe that such a break is not likely to have ever occurred. And a new survey of the period in question is leading us to the conviction that, as a matter of fact, it did not occur.

For a long time the history of the Roman Empire was written by the descendants of its most deadly enemies—by Christian ecclesiastics or by scholars trained under their influence, and by the inheritors of the northern races who overran and destroyed it. The natural tendency of both classes was to paint the vices of the old society in the most glaring colours, that by so doing they might exhibit the virtues of its conquerors and the necessity of their mission in stronger relief. In this respect, their task was greatly facilitated by the character of

the authorities from whom their information was principally derived. Horace and Petronius, Seneca and Juvenal, Tacitus and Suetonius, furnished them with pictures of depravity which it was impossible to exaggerate, which had even to be toned down before they could be reproduced in a modern language. No allowance was made for the influence of a rhetorical training in fostering the cultivation of effect at the expense of truth, nor for the influence of aristocratic prejudice in securing a ready acceptance for whatever tended to the discredit of a monarchical government. It was also forgotten that the court and society of Rome could give no idea of the life led in the rest of Italy and in the provinces. Moreover, the contrast continually instituted or implied by these historians was not between the ancient civilisation and the state of things which immediately succeeded it, nor yet between the society of a great capital as it was then, and as it was in the historian's own time. The points selected for contrast were what was worst in Paganism and what is best in Christianity. The one was judged from the standpoint of courtiers and men of the world, embittered by disappointment and familiar with every form of depravity, the other was judged from the standpoint of experience acquired in a college quadrangle, a country parsonage, or a cathedral close. The modern writer knew little enough even about his own country, he knew next to nothing about what morality was in the Middle Ages, and nothing at all about what it still continues to be in modern Italy.

Even the very imperfect means of information supplied by the literature of the empire were not utilised to the fullest extent. It was naturally the writers of most brilliant genius who received most attention, and these, as it happened, were the most prejudiced against their contemporaries. Their observations, too, were put on record under the form of sweeping generalisations; while the facts from which a different conclusion might be gathered lay scattered through the pages of more obscure authorities, needing to be carefully sifted out and brought together by those who wished to arrive at a more impartial view of the age to which they relate.

Another noteworthy circumstance is that the last centuries of Paganism were on the whole marked by a steady literary decline. To a literary man, this meant that civilisation as a whole was retrograding, that it was an effete organism which could only be regenerated by the infusion of new life from without; while, conversely, the fresh literary productivity of mediaeval and modern Europe was credited to the complete renovation which Christianity and the Barbarians were supposed to have wrought. A closer study of Roman law has done much to correct this superficial impression. It has revealed the

existence, in at least one most important domain, of a vast intellectual and moral advance continued down to the death of Marcus Aurelius. And the retrograde movement which set in with Commodus may be fairly attributed to the increased militarism necessitated by the encroachments of barbarism, and more directly to the infusion of barbarian elements into the territory of the empire, rather than to any spontaneous decay of Roman civilisation. The subsequent resuscitation of art and letters is another testimony to the permanent value and vitality of ancient culture. It was in those provinces which had remained least affected by the northern invasion, such as Venetia and Tuscany, that the free activity of the human intellect was first or most fruitfully resumed, and it was from the irradiation of still unconquered Byzantium that the light which re-awakened them was derived.

Another science which has only been cultivated on a large scale within comparatively recent years has confirmed the views suggested by jurisprudence. An enormous mass of inscriptions has been brought to light, deciphered, collated, and made available by transcription for the purposes of sedentary scholars. With the help of these records, fragmentary though they be, we have obtained an insight into the sentiments, beliefs, and social institutions of Pagan antiquity as it was just before the conversion of the Roman world to Christianity, such as literature alone could not supply. Literature and history, too, have told a somewhat different story when read over again in the light of these new discoveries. Finally, the whole mine of materials, new and old, has been worked by a class of enquirers who bring to their task qualities nearly unknown among the scholars of a former generation. These men are familiar with an immense range of studies lying outside their special subject, but often capable of affording it unexpected illustrations; they are free from theological prejudices; they are sometimes versed in the practical conduct of state affairs; and habits of wide social intercourse have emancipated them from the narrowing associations incident to a learned profession.

Perhaps no subject has gained so much from the application of the new historical method as that which we have now to study in its connexion with the progress of Greek philosophy. This is the religion of the Roman empire. On former occasions attention has been drawn to the fruitful interaction between faith and reason in the early stages of Greek thought. It has now to be shown how the same process was continued on a greater scale during its later development and diffusion. The conditions and results of this conflict have sometimes been gravely misconceived. I have said that in more than one direction important advances were made under the empire. In

the direction of pure rationalism, however, there was no advance at all, but, on the contrary, a continual loss of the ground formerly won. The polytheism which Christianity displaced turns out to have been far more vigorous and fertile than was once supposed, and in particular to have been supported by a much stronger body not only of popular sentiment, but, what at first seems more surprising, of educated conviction. We were formerly taught to believe that the faith of Homer and Aeschylus, of Pythagoras and Pheidias, was in the last stage of decrepitude when its destined successor appeared, that it had long been abandoned by the philosophers, and was giving place in the minds of the vulgar to more exciting forms of superstition newly imported from the East. The undue preponderance given to purely literary sources of information is largely responsible for an opinion which now appears to have been mistaken. Among the great Roman writers, Lucretius proclaims himself a mortal enemy to religion; Ennius and Horace are disbelievers in providence; the attitude of Juvenal towards the gods and towards a future life is at least ambiguous, and that of Tacitus undecided; Cicero attacks the current superstitions with a vigour which has diverted attention from the essentially religious character of his convictions; Lucian, by far the most popular Greek writer of the empire, is notorious for his hostility to every form of theology. Among less known authors, the elder Pliny passionately denounces the belief in a divine guidance of life and in the immortality of the soul.¹ Taken alone, these instances would tend to prove that sceptical ideas were very widely diffused through Roman society, both before and after the establishment of the empire. Side by side, however, with the authorities just cited there are others breathing a very different spirit; and what we have especially to notice is that with the progress of time the latter party are continually gaining in weight and numbers. And this, as will now appear, is precisely what might have been expected from the altered circumstances that ensued when the civilised world was subjected to a single city, and that city herself to a single chief.

II

In the world of thought no less than in the world of action, the boundless license which characterised the last days of Roman republicanism was followed by a period of tranquillity and restraint. Augustus endeavoured to associate his system of imperialism with a revival of religious authority. By his orders a great number of ruinous temples were restored, and the old

¹ Friedländer, *Römische Sittengeschichte*, iii., pp. 483, 681 (5th German ed.).

ceremonies were celebrated once more with all their former pomp.¹ His efforts in this direction were ably seconded by the greatest poet and the greatest historian of the age. Both Vergil and Livy were animated by a warm religious feeling, associated, at least in the case of the latter, with a credulity which knew no bounds. With both, religion took an antiquarian form. They were convinced that Rome had grown great through faith in the gods, that she had a divine mandate to conquer the world, and that this supernatural mission might be most clearly perceived in the circumstances of her first origin. It is also characteristic that both should have been provincials, educated in the traditions of a reverent conservatism, and sympathising chiefly with those elements in the constitution of Rome which brought her nearest to primitive Italian habits and ideas. Now it was not merely the policy, it was the inevitable consequence of imperialism to favour the provinces² at the expense of the capital, by depriving the urban population and the senatorial aristocracy of the political preponderance which they had formerly enjoyed. Here, as in most other instances, what we call a reaction did not mean a change in the opinions or sentiments of any particular persons or classes, but the advent of a new class whose ways of thinking now determined the general tone of the public mind.

One symptom of this reaction was the fashionable archaism of the Augustan age, the tendency to despise whatever was new in literature, and to exalt whatever was old. It is well known how feelingly Horace complains of a movement which was used to damage his own reputation as a poet;³ but what seems to have escaped observation is, that this protest against the literary archaism of his contemporaries is only one symptom of a much profounder division between his philosophy and theirs. He was just as good a patriot as they were, but his sympathies were with the Hellenising aristocracy to which Lucretius and Cicero had belonged, not with the narrow-minded conservatism of the middle classes and the country people. He was a man of progress and free-thought, who accepted the empire for what it might be worth, a Roman Prosper Mérimée or Sainte-Beuve, whose preference of order to anarchy did not involve any respect for superstitious beliefs simply because they were supported by authority. And this healthy common sense is so much a part of his character, that he sometimes gives his mistresses the benefit of it, warning Leuconoe against the Babylonian soothsayers, and telling Phidyle that the gods should be approached not only with sacrifices but with clean hands.⁴ Yet so strong was the

¹ *Monumentum Ancyranum*, 20; Suetonius, *Oct.* 31.

² Using the word in its modern rather than in its ancient sense, so as to include the whole empire outside the city of Rome.

³ *Epp.*, ii., I, 20 *sqq.*

⁴ *Carm.*, i., II., and iii., 23.

spirit of the age, that the sceptical poet occasionally feels himself obliged to second or to applaud the work of restoration undertaken by Augustus, and to augur from it, with more or less sincerity, a reformation in private life.¹ And even the frivolous Ovid may be supposed to have had the same object in view when composing his *Fasti*.

The religious revival initiated by Augustus for his own purposes was soon absorbed and lost in a much wider movement, following independent lines and determined by forces whose existence neither he nor any of his contemporaries could suspect. Even for his own purposes, something more was needed than a mere return to the past. The old Roman faith and worship were too dry and meagre to satisfy the cravings of the Romans themselves in the altered conditions created for them by the possession of a world-wide empire; still less could they furnish a meeting-ground for all the populations which that empire was rapidly fusing into a single mass. But what was wanted might be trusted to evolve itself without any assistance from without, once free scope was given to the religious instincts of mankind. These had long been kept in abeyance by the creeds which they had originally called into existence, and by the rigid political organisation of the ancient city-state. Local patriotism was adverse to the introduction of new beliefs either from within or from without. Once the general interests of a community had been placed under the guardianship of certain deities with definite names and jurisdictions, it was understood that they would feel offended at the prospect of seeing their privileges invaded by a rival power; and were that rival the patron of another community, his introduction might seem like a surrender of national independence at the feet of an alien conqueror. So, also, no very active proselytism was likely to be carried on when the adherents of each particular religion believed that its adoption by an alien community would enable strangers and possible enemies to secure a share of the favour which had hitherto been reserved for themselves exclusively. And to allure away the gods of a hostile town by the promise of a new establishment was, in fact, one of the stratagems commonly employed by the general of the besieging army.²

If the Roman conquest did not altogether put an end to these sentiments, it considerably mitigated their intensity. The imperial city was too strong to feel endangered by the introduction of alien deities within its precincts. The subject states were relieved from anxiety with regard to a political independence which they had irrecoverably lost. Moreover, since the conquests of Alexander, vast aggregations of human beings

¹ *Carm.*, iii., 6, and the *Carmen Seculare*.

² Boissier, *Religion Romaine*, i., p. 336.

had come into existence, to which the ancient exclusiveness was unknown, because they never had been cities at all in the ancient sense of the word. Such were Alexandria and Antioch, and these speedily became centres of religious syncretism. Rome herself, in becoming the capital of an immense empire, acquired the same cosmopolitan character. Her population consisted for the most part of emancipated slaves, and of adventurers from all parts of the world, many of whom had brought their national faiths with them, while all were ready to embrace any new faith which had superior attractions to offer. Another important agent in the diffusion and propagation of new religions was the army. The legions constituted a sort of migratory city, recruited from all parts of the empire, and moving over its whole extent. The dangers of a military life combined with its authoritative ideas are highly favourable to devotion ; and the soldiers could readily adopt new modes for the expression of this feeling both from each other and from the inhabitants of the countries where they were stationed, and would in turn become missionaries for their dissemination over the most distant regions. That such was actually the case is proved by numerous religious inscriptions found in the neighbourhood of Roman camps.¹

After considering by what agencies the seeds of religious belief were carried from place to place, we have to examine, what was even more important, the quality of the soil on which they fell. And here, to continue the metaphor, we shall find that the Roman plough had not only broken through the crust of particularist prejudice, but had turned up new social strata eminently fitted to receive and nourish the germs scattered over their surface by every breeze and every bird of passage, or planted and watered by a spiritual sower's hand. Along with the positive check of an established worship, the negative check of dissolving criticism had, to a great extent, disappeared with the destruction of the régime which had been most favourable to its exercise during the early stages of progress. The old city aristocracies were not merely opposed on patriotic grounds to free-trade in religion, but, as the most educated and independent class in the community, they were the first to shake off supernatural beliefs of every kind. We have grown so accustomed to seeing those beliefs upheld by the partisans of political privilege and attacked in the name of democratic principles, that we are apt to forget how very modern is the association of free-thought with the supremacy of numbers. It only dates from the French Revolution, and even now it is far from obtaining everywhere. Athens was the most perfectly organised democracy of antiquity, and in the course of this

¹ Friedländer, iii., p. 510.

work we have repeatedly had occasion to observe how strong was the spirit of religious bigotry among the Athenian people. If we want rationalistic opinions we must go to the great nobles and their friends, to a Pericles, a Critias, or a Protagoras. There must also have been perfect intellectual liberty among the Roman nobles who took up Hellenic culture with such eagerness towards the middle of the second century B.C., and among those who, at a later period, listened with equanimity or approval to Caesar's profession of Epicureanism in a crowded senatorial debate. It was as much in order that the *De Rerum Naturâ* should have been written by a member of this class as that the *Aeneid* should proceed from the pen of a modest provincial farmer. In positive knowledge, Vergil greatly excelled Lucretius, but his beliefs were inevitably determined by the traditions of his ignorant neighbours. When civil war, proscription, delation, and, perhaps more than any other cause, their own delirious extravagance, had wrought the ruin of the Roman aristocracy, their places were taken by respectable provincials who brought with them the convictions without the genius of the Mantuan poet; and thenceforward the tide of religious reaction never ceased rising until the Crusades, which were its supreme expression, unexpectedly brought about a first revival of Hellenic culture. On that occasion, also, the first symptoms of revolt manifested themselves among the nobles; taking the form of Gnosticism in the brilliant courts of Languedoc, and, at a later period, of Epicureanism in the Ghibelline circles of Florentine society; while, conversely, when the Ciompi or poorer artisans of Florence rose in revolt against the rich traders, one of the first demands made by the successful insurgents was, that a preaching friar should be sent to give them religious instruction. At a still later period, the same opposition of intellectual interests continues to be defined by the same social divisions. Two distinct currents of thought co-operated to bring about the Protestant Reformation. One, which was religious and reactionary, proceeded from the people. The other, which was secularising, scholarly, and scientific, represented the tendencies of the upper classes and of those who looked to them for encouragement and support. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many noble names are to be found among the champions of reason; and while speculative liberty is associated with the ascendancy of the aristocratic party, superstition and intolerance are associated with the triumph of the people, whether under the form of a democracy or of a levelling despotism. So, also, the great emancipating movement of the eighteenth century was fostered by the descendants of the Crusaders, and, until after the Revolution, met with no response among the bourgeoisie or the

people; indeed the reaction in favour of supernaturalism was begun by a child of the people, Rousseau. All this has been reversed in more recent times; but the facts quoted are enough to prove how natural it was that in the ancient world decay of class privileges should be equivalent to a strengthening of the influences which made for supernaturalism and against enlightened criticism.

III

After the revolution which destroyed the political power of the old aristocracy, there came a further revolution the effect of which was to diminish largely its social predominance. We learn from the bitter sarcasms of Horace and Juvenal that under the empire wealth took the place of birth, if not, as those satirists pretend, of merit, as a passport to distinction and respect. Merely to possess a certain amount of money procured admission to the equestrian and senatorial orders; while a smaller pecuniary qualification entitled any Roman citizen to rank among the *Honestiores* as opposed to the *Humiliores*, the latter only being liable, if found guilty of certain offences, to the more atrocious forms of capital punishment, such as death by the wild beasts or by fire.¹ Even a reputation for learning was supposed to be a marketable commodity; and when supreme power was held by a philosopher, the vulgar rich could still hope to attract his favourable notice by filling their houses with books.² We also know from Juvenal, what indeed the analogy of modern times would readily suggest, that large fortunes were often rapidly made, and made by the cultivation of very sordid arts. Thus members of the most ignorant and superstitious classes were constantly rising to positions where they could set the tone of public opinion, or at least help to determine its direction.

The military organisation of the empire had the further effect of giving a high social status to retired centurions—men probably recruited from the most barbarous provincial populations, and certainly more remarkable for their huge size than for their mental gifts.³ When one of these heroes heard a philosopher state that nothing can be made out of nothing, he would ask with a horse-laugh whether that was any reason for going without one's dinner.⁴ On the other hand, when it came to be a question of supernatural agency, as we know by a touching story in the Gospels, a man of this type would show a

¹ See the note on *Honestiores* and *Humiliores* appended to the fifth volume of Duruy's *Histoire des Romains*.

² Lucian, *Adversus Indoctum*.

³ Juvenal, *Satt.*, xvi., 14.

⁴ Persius, *Satt.*, iii., 77 *sqq.*; cp. v., 189.

faith not found in Israel. Imbued with the idea of personal authority, he readily believed that any one standing high in the favour of God could cure diseases from a distance by simply giving them the word of command to depart.¹

A much more important factor in the social movement than those already mentioned was the ever-increasing influence of women. This probably stood at the lowest point to which it has ever fallen, during the classic age of Greek life and thought. In the history of Thucydides, so far as it forms a connected series of events, four times only during a period of nearly seventy years does a woman cross the scene. In each instance her apparition only lasts for a moment. In three of the four instances she is a queen or a princess, and belongs either to the half-barbarous kingdoms of northern Hellas or to wholly barbarous Thrace. In the one remaining instance—that of the woman who helps some of the trapped Thebans to make their escape from Plataea—while her deed of mercy will live for ever, her name is for ever lost.² But no sooner did philosophy abandon physics for ethics and religion than the importance of those subjects to women was perceived, first by Socrates, and after him by Xenophon and Plato. Women are said to have attended Plato's lectures disguised as men. Women formed part of the circle which gathered round Epicurus in his suburban retreat. Others aspired not only to learn but to teach. Arêtê, the daughter of Aristippus, handed on the Cyrenaic doctrine to her son, the younger Aristippus. Hipparchia, the wife of Crates the Cynic, earned a place among the representatives of his school. But all these were exceptions; some of them belonged to the class of Hetaerae; and philosophy, although it might address itself to them, remained unaffected by their influence. The case was widely different in Rome, where women were far more highly honoured than in Greece;³ and even if the prominent part assigned to them in the legendary history of the city be a proof, among others, of its untrustworthiness, still that such stories should be thought worth inventing and preserving is an indirect proof

¹ Matth., viii., 9; Luke, vii., 8.

² Thucydides, ii., 4. The other women alluded to are, the wife of Admêtus, who tells Themistocles how he is to proceed in order to conciliate her husband (i., 136); Stratonice, the sister whom Perdiccas gives in marriage to Seuthes (ii., 101); and Brauro, the Edonian queen who murders her husband Pittacus (iv., 107). The wife and daughter of Hippias the Peisistratid and the sister of Harmodius are mentioned in bk. vi., 55 *sqq.*, but they take us back to an earlier period of Greek history than that of which Thucydides treats consecutively; while the names of Helen and Procne, which also occur, belong, of course, to a much remoter past (i., 9, and ii., 29).

³ It has even been maintained that the condition of the Roman matron was superior to that of the modern Frenchwoman. (Duruy, *Histoire des Romains*, v., p. 41.)

of the extent to which feminine influence prevailed. With the loss of political liberty, their importance, as always happens at such a conjuncture, was considerably increased. Under a personal government there is far more scope for intrigue than where law is king; and as intriguers women are at least the equals of men. Moreover, they profited fully by the levelling tendencies of the age. One great service of the imperial jurisconsults was to remove some of the disabilities under which women formerly suffered. According to the old law, they were placed under male guardianship through their whole life, but this restraint was first reduced to a legal fiction by compelling the guardian to do what they wished, and at last it was entirely abolished. Their powers both of inheritance and bequest were extended; they frequently possessed immense wealth; and their wealth was sometimes expended for purposes of public munificence. Their social freedom seems to have been unlimited, and they formed combinations among themselves which probably served to increase their general influence.¹

All these circumstances taken together would permit the Roman women to have opinions of their own if they liked, and would ensure a respectful hearing for whatever they had to say; while the men who had opinions to propagate would, for the same reason, be deeply interested in securing their adhesion. On the other hand, they received a good literary education, being sent apparently to the same schools as their brothers, and there made acquainted with, at least, the Latin poets.² Thus they would possess the degree of culture necessary for readily receiving and transmitting new impressions. And we know, as a matter of fact, that many Roman ladies entered eagerly into the literary movement of the age, sharing the studies of their husbands, discoursing on questions of grammar, freely expressing their opinion on the relative merits of different poets, and even attempting authorship on their own account.³ Philosophy, as it was then taught, attracted a considerable share of their attention; and some great ladies were constantly attended by a Stoic professor, to whose lectures they listened seemingly with more patience than profit.⁴ One of their favourite studies was Plato's *Republic*, according to Epictëtus, because it advocated a community of wives;⁵ or, as we may more charitably suggest, because it admitted women to an equality with men. But there is no evidence to prove that their inquisitiveness ever

¹ Boissier, *Religion Romaine*, ii., p. 200. ² Boissier, *op. cit.*, ii., pp. 214 *sqq.*

³ Friedländer, *Römische Sittengeschichte*, i., pp. 410, 441 *sqq.*

⁴ Lucian, *De Mercede Conductis*, xxxvi.; Friedländer, i., p. 447.

⁵ Epict., *Fragm.*, 53 Dübner,

went to the length of questioning the foundations of religious faith; and we may fairly reckon their increasing influence among the forces which were tending to bring about an overwhelming religious revival among the educated classes.

In this connexion, some importance must also be attributed to the more indirect influence exercised by children. These did not form a particularly numerous class in the upper ranks of Roman society; but, to judge by what we see in modern France, the fewer there were of them the more attention were they likely to receive; and their interests, which like those of the other defenceless classes had been depressed or neglected under the aristocratic régime, were favoured by the reforming and levelling movement of the empire. One of Juvenal's most popular satires is entirely devoted to the question of their education; and, in reference to this, the point of view most prominently put forward is the importance of the examples which are offered to them by their parents. Juvenal, himself a free-thinker, is exceedingly anxious that they should not be indoctrinated with superstitious opinions; but we may be sure that a different order of considerations would equally induce others to give their children a careful religious training, and to keep them at a distance from sceptical influences; while the spontaneous tendency of children to believe in the supernatural would render it easier to give them moral instruction under a religious form.

To complete our enumeration of the forces by which a new public opinion was being created, we must mention the slaves. Though still liable to be treated with great barbarity, the condition of this class was considerably ameliorated under the empire. Their lives and, in the case of women, their chastity, were protected by law; they were allowed by custom to accumulate property; they had always the hope of liberty before their eyes, for emancipations were frequent and were encouraged by the new legislation; they often lived on terms of the closest intimacy with their masters, and were sometimes educated enough to converse with them on subjects of general interest. Now a servile condition is more favourable than any other to religious ideas. It inculcates habits of unquestioning submission to authority; and by the miseries with which it is attended immensely enhances the value of consolatory beliefs, whether they take the form of faith in divine protection during this life, or of a compensation for its afflictions in the next. Moreover, a great majority of the Roman slaves came from those Eastern countries which were the native land of superstition, and thus served as missionaries of Oriental cults and creeds in the West, besides furnishing apt disciples to the teachers who came from Asia with the express object of securing

converts to their religion in Rome. The part played by slaves in the diffusion of Christianity is well known ; what we have to observe at present is that their influence must equally have told in favour of every other supernaturalist belief, and, to the same extent, against the rationalism of writers like Horace and Lucian.

Thus Roman civilisation, even when considered on its liberal, progressive, democratic side, seems to have necessarily favoured the growth and spread of superstition, because the new social strata which it turned up were less on their guard against unwarranted beliefs than the old governing aristocracies with their mingled conservatism and culture. But this was not all ; and on viewing the empire from another side we shall find that under it all classes alike were exposed to conditions eminently inconsistent with that individual independence and capacity for forming a private judgment which had so honourably distinguished at least one class under the republican régime. If imperialism was in one sense a levelling and democratic system, in another sense it was intensely aristocratic, or rather timocratic. Superiorities of birth, race, age, and sex were everywhere tending to disappear, only that they might be replaced by the more ignoble superiorities of brute force, of court-favour, and of wealth. The Palace set an example of caprice on the one side and of servility on the other which was faithfully followed through all grades of Roman society, less from a spirit of imitation than because circumstances were at work which made every rich man or woman the centre of a petty court consisting of voluntary dependents whose obsequiousness was rewarded by daily doles of food and money, by the occasional gift of a toga or even of a small farm, or by the hope of a handsome legacy. Before daybreak the doors of a wealthy house were surrounded by a motley crowd, including not only famished clients but praetors, tribunes, opulent freedmen, and even ladies in their litters ; all come nominally for the purpose of paying their respects to the master, but in reality to receive a small present of money. At a later hour, when the great man went abroad, he was attended by a troop of poor hangers-on, who, after trudging about for hours in his train and accompanying him home in the afternoon, often missed the place at his table which their assiduities were intended to secure. Even when it came, the invitation brought small comfort, as only the poorest food and the worst wine were set before the client, while he had the additional vexation of seeing his patron feasting on the choicest dishes and the most delicious vintages ; and this was also the lot of the domestic philosopher whom some rich men regarded as an indispensable member of their retinue.¹ Of course those who wished for a larger share of the

¹ Juvenal, *Sat.* v., and Lucian, *De Mercede Conductis*.

patron's favours could only hope to win it by unstinted tokens of admiration, deference, or assent; and probably many besides the master of thirty legions in the well-known story were invariably allowed to be right by the scholars with whom they condescended to dispute.

Besides the attentions lavished on every wealthy individual, those who had no children were especially courted, and that too by others who were as well off as themselves, with the object of being remembered in their wills. So advantageous a position, indeed, did these *orbi*, as they were called, occupy, that among the higher classes there was extreme unwillingness to marry; although, as an encouragement to population, the father of three children enjoyed several substantial privileges. This circumstance, again, by preventing the perpetuation of wealthy families, and allowing their property to pass into the hands of degraded fortune-hunters, rendered impossible the consolidation of a new aristocracy which might have reorganised the traditions of liberal culture, and formed an effectual barrier against the downward pressure of despotism on the one side and the inroads of popular superstition on the other.

As a last illustration of the extent to which authority and subordination were pushed in Roman society, it may be mentioned that the better class of slaves were permitted to keep slaves for their own service. But whether the institution of slavery as a whole should be reckoned among the conditions favourable to authoritative beliefs is doubtful, as it was an element common to every period of antiquity. Perhaps, however paradoxical such an assertion may seem, the very frequency of emancipation gave increased strength to the feeling of dependence on an overruling personal power. A freedman could not forget that the most important event in his life was due, not to any natural law, but to the will or the caprice of a master; and this reflection must have confirmed his faith in the divine beings of whom he and his master were fellow-slaves.

IV

We have now to see what new beliefs gained most ground, and what old beliefs were most successfully revived, through the combination of favourable conditions, an analysis of which has been attempted in the preceding pages. Among the host of creeds which at this period competed with one another for the favour of the rich or for the suffrages of the poor, there were some that possessed a marked advantage over their rivals in the struggle for existence. The worship of nature considered as imaging the vicissitudes of human life, could not fail to be the most popular of any. All who desired a bond of sympathy

uniting them with their fellow-subjects over the whole empire, and even with the tribes beyond its frontiers, might meet on this most universal ground. All who wished to combine excitement with devotion were attracted by the dramatic representation of birth and death, of bereavement and sorrow and searching, of purification through suffering, and triumphant reunion with the lost objects of affection in this or in another world. Inquisitive or innovating minds were gratified by admission to secrets a knowledge of which was believed to possess inestimable value. And the most conservative could see in such celebrations an acknowledgment, under other forms, of some divinity which had always been revered in their own home, perhaps even the more authentic reproduction of adventures already related to them as dim and uncertain traditions of the past. More than one such cultus, representing under the traits of personal love and loss and recovery, the death of vegetation in winter and its return to life in spring, was introduced from the East, and obtained a wide popularity through the empire. Long before the close of the republic, the worship of Cybele was established in Rome with the sanction of the Senate. Other Asiatic deities of a much less respectable character, Astarte and the so-called Syrian goddess, though not officially recognised, enjoyed a celebrity extending to the remotest corners of the western world.¹ Still greater and more universal was the veneration bestowed on Isis and Serapis. From the prince to the peasant, from the philosopher to the ignorant girl, all classes united in doing homage to their power. Their mysteries were celebrated in the mountain valleys of the Tyrol, and probably created as much excitement among the people of that neighbourhood as the Ammergau passion-play does at present.² An inscription has been discovered describing in minute detail an offering made to Isis by a Spanish matron in honour of her little daughter. It was a silver statue richly ornamented with precious stones, resembling, as our authority observes, what would now be presented to the Madonna,³ who indeed is probably no more than a Christian adaptation of the Egyptian goddess. And Plutarch, or another learned and ingenious writer whose work has come down to us under his name, devotes a long treatise to Isis and Osiris, in which the mythical history of the goddess is as thickly covered with allegorical interpretations as the statue dedicated to her by the Spanish lady was covered with emeralds and pearls.

Another form of naturalistic religion, fitted for universal acceptance by its appeals to common experience, was the worship of the Sun. It was probably as such that Mithras,

¹ Friedländer, *iii.*, p. 502.

² Friedländer, *Ibid.*

³ Boissier, *op. cit.*, *i.*, p. 362.

a Syro-Persian deity, obtained a success throughout the Roman empire which at one time seemed to balance the rising fortunes of Christianity. Adoration of the heavenly bodies was, indeed, very common during this period, and was probably connected with the extreme prevalence of astrological superstition. It would also harmonise perfectly with the still surviving Olympian religion of the old Hellenic aristocracy, and would profit by the support which philosophy since the time of Socrates had extended to this form of supernaturalist belief. But, perhaps, for that very reason the classes which had now become the ultimate arbiters of opinion felt less sympathy with Mithras-worship and other kindred cults than with the Egyptian mysteries. These had a more recognisable bearing on their own daily life, and, like the Chthonian religions of old Greece, they included a reference to the immortality of the soul. Moreover, the climate of Europe, especially of western Europe, does not permit the sun to become an object of such excessive adoration as in southern Asia. Mithras-worship, then, is an example of the expansive force exhibited by Oriental ideas rather than of a faith which really satisfied the wants of the Roman world.

A far higher place must be assigned to Judaism among the competitors for the allegiance of Europe. The cosmopolitan importance at one time assumed by this religion has been considerably obscured, owing to the subsequent devolution of its part to Christianity. It is, however, by no means impossible that, but for the diversion created by the Gospel, and the disastrous consequences of their revolt against Rome, the Jews might have won the world to a purified form of their own monotheism. A few significant circumstances are recorded showing how much influence they had acquired, even in Rome, before the first preaching of Christianity. The first of these is to be found in Cicero's defence of Flaccus. The latter was accused of appropriating part of the annual contributions sent to the temple at Jerusalem; and, in dealing with this charge, Cicero speaks of the Jews, who were naturally prejudiced against his client, as a powerful faction the hostility of which he is anxious not to provoke.¹ Some twenty years later, a great advance has been made. Not only must the material interests of the Jews be respected, but a certain conformity to their religious prescriptions is considered a mark of good breeding. In one of his most amusing satires, Horace tells us how, being anxious to shake off a bore, he appeals for help to his friend Aristius Fuscus, and reminds him of some private business which they had to discuss together. Fuscus sees his object, and being mischievously determined to defeat it, answers: 'Yes,

¹ Cicero, *Pro Flacco*, 28.

I remember perfectly, but we must wait for some better opportunity; this is the thirtieth Sabbath, do you wish to insult the circumcised Jews?' 'I have no scruples on that point,' replies the impatient poet. 'But I have,' rejoins Fuscus,—'a little weak-minded, one of the many, you know—excuse me, another time.'¹ Nor were the Jews content with the countenance thus freely accorded them. The same poet elsewhere intimates that whenever they found themselves in a majority, they took advantage of their superior strength to make proselytes by force.² And they pursued the good work to such purpose that a couple of generations later we find Seneca bitterly complaining that the vanquished had given laws to the victors, and that the customs of this abominable race were established over the whole earth.³ Evidence to the same effect is given by Philo Judaeus and Josephus, who inform us that the Jewish laws and customs were admired, imitated, and obeyed over the whole earth.⁴ Such assertions might be suspected of exaggeration, were they not, to a certain extent, confirmed by the references already quoted, to which others of the same kind may be added from later writers showing that it was a common practice among the Romans to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and even to celebrate it by praying, fasting, and lighting lamps, to visit the synagogues, to study the law of Moses, and to pay the yearly contribution of two drachmas to the temple at Jerusalem.⁵

Then as now, Judaism seems to have had a much greater attraction for women than for men; and this may be accounted for not only by the greater credulity of the female sex, which would equally predispose them in favour of every other new religion, but also by their natural sympathy with the domestic virtues which are such an amiable and interesting feature in the Jewish character. Josephus tells us that towards the beginning of Nero's reign nearly all the women of Damascus were attached to Judaism;⁶ and he also mentions that Poppaea, the mistress and afterwards the wife of Nero, used her powerful influence for the protection of his compatriots, though whether she actually became a proselyte, as some have supposed, is doubtful.⁷ According to Ovid, the synagogues were much visited by Roman women, among others, apparently, by those of easy virtue, for he alludes to them as resorts which the man

¹ Hor., *Satt.*, i., 9, 67–72.

² *Ibid.*, i., 4, 142.

³ Quoted by S. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, vi., 11.

⁴ Philo, *Vita Mos.*, p. 136, M.; Joseph., *Contr. Ap.*, ii., 39; Friedländer, iii., p. 583.

⁵ Ovid., *Ars Am.*, i., 416; *Rem. Am.*, 219–220; Pers., v., 180; Juv., xiv., 101 sqq.; Friedländer, *op. cit.*, p. 582.

⁶ Havet, ii., p. 328.

⁷ Friedländer, i., p. 451.

of pleasure in search of a conquest will find it advantageous to frequent.¹

The monotheism of the Iahvist religion would seem to have marked it out as the natural faith of a universal empire. Yet, strange to say, it was not by this element of Judaism that proselytes were most attracted. Our authorities are unanimous in speaking of the sabbath-observance as the most distinguishing trait of the Jews themselves, and the point in which they were most scrupulously imitated by their adherents; while the duty of contributing to the maintenance of the temple apparently stood next in popular estimation. But if this be true, it follows that the liberation of the spiritualistic element in Judaism from its ceremonial husk was a less essential condition to the success of Christianity than some have supposed. What the world objected to in Judaism was not its concrete, historical, practical side, but its exclusiveness, and the hatred for other nations which it was supposed to breed. What the new converts wished was to take the place of the Jews, to supersede them in the divine favour, not to improve on their law. It was useless to tell them that they were under no obligation to observe the sabbath, when the institution of a day of rest was precisely what most fascinated them in the history of God's relations with his chosen people. And it was equally useless to tell them that the hour had come when the Father should not be worshipped any more at Jerusalem but everywhere in spirit and in truth, when Jerusalem had become irrevocably associated in their minds with the establishment of a divine kingdom on this earth. Thus, while the religion of the Middle Ages reached its intensest expression in armed pilgrimages to Palestine, the religion of modern Puritanism has embodied itself by preference in the observance of what it still delights to call the sabbath.

It must not be supposed that the influx of Asiatic religions into Europe was attended by any loss of faith in the old gods of Greece and Italy, or by any neglect of their worship. The researches of Friedländer have proved the absolute erroneousness of such an idea, widely entertained as it has been. Innumerable monuments are in existence testifying to the continued authority of the Olympian divinities, and particularly of Jupiter, over the whole extent of the Roman empire. Ample endowments were still devoted to the maintenance of their service; their temples still smoked with sacrifices; their litanies were still repeated as a duty which it would have been scandalous to neglect; in all hours of public and private danger their help was still implored, and acknowledged by the dedication of votive offerings when the danger was overcome; it was still believed, as in the days of Homer, that they

¹ *Ars Am.*, i. 76.

occasionally manifested themselves on earth, signalling their presence by works of superhuman power.¹ Nor was there anything anomalous in this peaceable co-existence of the old with the new faiths. So far back as we can trace the records both of Greek and Roman polytheism, they are remarkable for their receptive and assimilative capacity. The great goddesses Hêrê, Athênê, Artemis, and Aphroditê, together with the Arcadian Hermês are supposed by Dr. Farnell to have been old Aegean divinities adopted and more or less transformed by the invading Hellenes.² Dionysus and Ares were probably imported from Thrace.³ Roman religion under its oldest form included both a Latin or Sabine and an Etruscan element; at a subsequent period it became Hellenised without losing anything of its grave and decorous character. In Greece, the elastic system of divine relationships was stretched a little further so as to make room for the new comers. The same system, when introduced into Roman mythology, served to connect and enliven what previously had been so many rigid and isolated abstractions. With both, the supreme religious conception continued to be what it had been with their Aryan ancestors, that of a heavenly Father Jove; and the fashionable deities of the empire were received into the pantheon of Homer and Hesiod as recovered or adopted children of the same Olympian sire. The danger to Hellenistic polytheism was not from another form of the same type, but from a faith which should refuse to amalgamate with it on any terms; and in the environment created by Roman imperialism with its unifying and cosmopolitan character, such a faith, if it existed anywhere, could not fail in the long-run to supersede and extinguish its more tolerant rivals. But the immediate effect produced by giving free play to men's religious instincts was not the concentration of their belief on a single object, or on new to the exclusion of old objects, but an extraordinary abundance and complexity of supernaturalism under all its forms. This general tendency, again, admits of being decomposed into two distinct currents, according as it was determined by the introduction of alien superstitions from without, or by the development of native and popular superstition from within. But, in each case, the retrogressive movement resulted from the same political revolution. At once critical and conservative, the city-aristocracies prevented the perennial germs of religious life from multiplying to any serious

¹ Friedländer, iii., pp. 518, 539 *sqq.*, 553 *sqq.*

² *Egypt and Babylon*, pp. 96 *sq.*; *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. v., pp. 1-9.

³ For Dionysus see Farnell, *Cults*, v., p. 86; for Ares, J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p. 375 *sqq.*. Dr. Farnell, however, has doubts about the Thracian origin of Ares (*op. cit.*, p. 399).

extent within the limits of their jurisdiction, no less vigilantly than they prohibited the importation of its completed products from abroad. We have now to study the behaviour of these germs when the restraint to which they had formerly been subjected was lightened or withdrawn.

V

The old religions of Greece and Italy were essentially oracular. While inculcating the existence of supernatural beings, and prescribing the modes according to which such beings were to be worshipped, they paid most attention to the interpretation of the signs by which either future events in general, or the consequences of particular actions, were supposed to be divinely revealed. Of these intimations, some were given to the whole world, so that he who ran might read, others were reserved for certain favoured localities, and only communicated through the appointed ministers of the god. The Delphic oracle in particular enjoyed an enormous reputation both among Greeks and barbarians for guidance afforded under the latter conditions; and during a considerable period it may even be said to have directed the course of Hellenic civilisation. It was also under this form that supernatural religion suffered most injury from the great intellectual movement which followed the Persian wars. Men who had learned to study the constant sequences of nature for themselves, and to shape their conduct according to fixed principles of prudence or of justice, either thought it irreverent to trouble the god about questions on which they were competent to form an opinion for themselves, or did not choose to place a well-considered scheme at the mercy of his possibly interested responses. That such a revolution occurred about the middle of the fifth century B.C., seems proved by the great change of tone in reference to this subject which one perceives on passing from Aeschylus to Sophocles. That any one should question the veracity of an oracle is a supposition which never crosses the mind of the elder dramatist. A knowledge of augury counts among the greatest benefits conferred by Prometheus on mankind, and the Titan brings Zeus himself to terms by his acquaintance with the secrets of destiny. Sophocles, on the other hand, evidently has to deal with a sceptical generation, despising prophecies and needing to be warned of the fearful consequences brought about by neglecting their injunctions. As to Euripides, in his opinion Apollo is either a fool or a knave.

Probably few contributed so much to the change as Socrates, notwithstanding his general piety and the credulity that he exhibited on this particular point. For his ethical and dialectical

training, combined with the careful study of facts that he so earnestly recommended, went very far towards making a consultation of the oracle superfluous ; and he did actually impress on his auditors the duty of dispensing with its assistance in all cases except those where a knowledge of the future was necessary and could not be otherwise obtained.¹ Even so superstitious a believer as Xenophon improved on his master's lessons in this respect, and instead of asking the Pythia whether he should take service with the younger Cyrus—as Socrates had advised—simply asked to what god he should sacrifice before starting on the expedition. Towards the beginning of our era, as is well known, the Greek oracles had fallen into complete neglect and silence.

But all this time the popular belief in omens had continued unaffected, and had apparently even increased. The peculiar Greek feeling known as *Deisidaimonia* is first satirised by Theophrastus, who defines it as cowardice with regard to the gods, and gives several amusing instances of the anxiety occasioned by its presence—all connected with the interpretation of omens—such as Aristophanes could hardly have failed to notice had they been usual in his time. Nor were such fancies confined to the ignorant classes. Although the Stoics cannot be accused of *Deisidaimonia*, they gave their powerful sanction to the belief in divination, as has been already mentioned in our account of their philosophy. It would seem that whatever authority the great oracular centres had lost was simply handed over to lower and more popular forms of the same superstition.

In Rome, as well as in Greece, rationalism took the form of disbelief in divination. Here at least the Epicurean, the Academician, and, among the Stoics, the disciple of Panaetius, were all agreed. But as the sceptical movement began at a much later period in Rome than in the country where it first originated, so also did the supernaturalist reaction come later, the age of Augustus in the one corresponding very nearly with the age of Alexander in the other. Vergil and Livy are remarkable for their faith in omens ; and although Livy complains of the general incredulity with which narratives of such events were received, his statements are to be taken rather as an index of what people thought in the age immediately preceding his own, than as an accurate description of contemporary opinion. Certainly nothing could be farther from the truth than to say that signs and prodigies were disregarded by the Romans under the empire. Even the cool and cautious Tacitus feels himself obliged to relate sundry marvellous incidents which seemed to accompany or to prefigure great historical catastrophes ; and the more credulous Suetonius has

¹ Xenophon, *Mem.*, i., 1, 9.

transcribed an immense number of such incidents from the pages of older chroniclers, besides informing us of the extreme attention paid even to trifling omens by Augustus.¹

Meanwhile the recognised methods for looking into futurity continued to enjoy their old popularity, and that which relied on indications afforded by the entrails of sacrifices was practised with unabated confidence down to the time of Julian.² Even faith in natural law, where it existed, accommodated itself to the prevalent superstition by taking the form of astrology; and it is well known what reliance the emperor Tiberius, for his time a singularly enlightened man, placed on predictions derived from observation of the starry heavens.

Subsequently, with the revival of Hellenism, the Greek oracles broke silence, and regained even more than their ancient reputation, as the increased facilities for locomotion now rendered them accessible from the remotest regions.³ Sometimes the miraculous character of their responses resulted in the conversion of hardened infidels. In this connexion, the following anecdote is related by Plutarch. A certain governor of Cilicia entertained serious doubts about the gods, and was still further confirmed in his impiety by the Epicureans who surrounded him. This man, for the purpose of throwing discredit on the famous oracle of Mopsus, sent a freedman to consult it, bearing a sealed letter containing a question with whose purport neither he nor any one else except the sender was acquainted. On arriving at the oracle, the messenger was admitted to pass a night within the temple, which was the method of consultation usually practised there. In his sleep a beautiful figure appeared to him, and after uttering the words 'a black one,' immediately vanished. On hearing this answer the governor fell on his knees in consternation, and, opening the sealed tablet, showed his friends the question which it contained, 'Shall I sacrifice a white or a black bull to thee?' The Epicureans were confounded; while the governor offered up the prescribed sacrifice, and became thenceforth a constant adorer of Mopsus.⁴

Nothing, as Friedländer observes, shows so well what intense credulity prevailed at this time, with reference to phenomena of a marvellous description, as the success obtained by a celebrated impostor, Alexander of Abonuteichus, whose adventurous career may still be studied in one of Lucian's liveliest pieces. Here it will be enough to mention that Alexander was a clever charlatan of imposing figure, winning manners, and boundless effrontery, who established himself in Abonuteichus, a small town in

¹ Friedländer, iii., p. 523.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 524 *sqq.*

³ Friedländer, iii., pp. 527 *sqq.*

⁴ Plutarch, *De Defect. Oracul.*, cap. xlv., p. 434.

Paphlagonia, on the southern shore of the Black Sea, where he made a trade of giving oracles in the name of Asclêpius. The god of healing was represented for the occasion by a large tame serpent fitted with a human head made of painted canvas and worked by horsehair strings. Sometimes the oracular responses were delivered by the mouth of the god himself. This was managed with the help of a confederate who spoke through a tube connected with the false head. Such direct communications were, however, only granted as an exceptional favour and for a high price. In most instances the answer was given in writing, and the fee charged for it only amounted to a shilling of our money. Alexander had originally fixed on Abonuteichus, which was his native place and therefore well known to him, as the seat of his operations, on account of the extraordinary superstition of its inhabitants; but the people of the adjacent provinces soon showed themselves to be nowise behind his fellow-townsmen in their credulity. The fame of the new oracle spread over all Asia Minor and Thrace; and visitors thronged to it in such numbers as sometimes to produce a scarcity of provisions. The prophet's gross receipts rose to an average of 3,000*l.* a year, and the office of interpreting his more ambiguous responses became so lucrative that the two exegetes employed for this purpose paid each a talent a year (240*l.*) for the privilege of exercising it.

It was from the Epicureans, of whom we are told that there were a considerable number in these parts, that the most serious opposition to the impostor proceeded; but he contrived to silence their criticisms by denouncing them to the fanatical multitude as 'atheists and Christians.' Towards Epicurus himself Alexander nourished an undying hatred; and when the oracle was consulted with regard to that philosopher's fate, it made answer that he was 'bound in leaden chains and seated in a morass.' The *κύρια δόξαι*, or summary of the Epicurean creed, he publicly burned and threw its ashes into the sea; and one unfortunate town which contained a large school of Epicureans he punished by refusing its inhabitants access to the oracle. On the other hand, according to Lucian, he was on the best of terms with the disciples of Plato, Chrysippus, and Pythagoras.¹

At last tidings of the oracle made their way to Italy and Rome, where they created intense excitement, particularly among the leading men of the state. One of these, Rutilianus, a man of consular dignity and well known for his abject superstition, threw himself head-foremost into the fashionable delusion. He sent off messenger after messenger in hot haste to the shrine of Asclêpius; and the wily Paphlagonian easily contrived that

¹ Lucian, *Alexander*, 25, 47.

the reports which they carried back should still further inflame the curiosity and wonder of his noble devotee. But, in truth, no great refinement of imposture was needed to complete the capture of such a willing dupe. One of his questions was, what teacher should he employ to direct the studies of his son? Pythagoras and Homer were recommended in the oracular response. A few days afterwards, the boy died, much to the discomfiture of Alexander, whose enemies took the opportunity of triumphing over what seemed an irretrievable mistake. But Rutilianus himself came to the rescue. The oracle, he said, clearly foreshadowed his son's death, by naming teachers who could only be found in the world below. Finally, on being consulted with regard to the choice of a wife, the oracle promptly recommended the daughter of Alexander and the Moon; for the prophet professed to have enjoyed the favours of that goddess in the same circumstances as Endymion. Rutilianus, who was at this time sixty years old, at once complied with the divine injunction, and celebrated his marriage by sacrificing whole hecatombs to his celestial mother-in-law.

With so powerful a protector, Alexander might safely bid his enemies defiance. The governor of Bithynia had to entreat Lucian, whose life had been threatened by the impostor, to keep out of harm's way. 'Should anything happen to you,' he said, 'I could not afford to offend Rutilianus by bringing his father-in-law to justice.' Even the best and wisest man then living yielded to the prevalent delusion. Marcus Aurelius, who was at that time fighting with the Marcomanni, was induced to act on an oracle from Abonuteichus, promising that if two lions were thrown into the Danube a great victory would be the result. The animals made their way safely to the opposite bank; but were beaten to death with clubs by the barbarians, who mistook them for some outlandish kind of wolf or dog; and the imperial army was shortly afterwards defeated with a loss of 20,000 men.¹ Alexander helped himself out of the difficulty with the stale excuse that he had only foretold a victory, without saying which side should win. He was not more successful in determining the duration of his own life, which came to an end before he had completed seventy years, instead of lasting, as he had prophesied, for a hundred and fifty. This miscalculation, however, seems not to have impaired his reputation, for even after his death it was believed that a statue of him in the market-place of Parium in Mysia had the power of giving oracles.²

¹ According to Friedländer (iii., p. 531), this happened between 167 and 169.

² Friedländer, p. 532.

VI

Another widespread superstition was the belief in prophetic or premonitory dreams. This was shared by some even among those who rejected supernatural religion,—a phenomenon not unparalleled at the present day. Thus the elder Pliny tells us how a soldier of the Praetorian Guard in Rome was cured of hydrophobia by a remedy revealed in a dream to his mother in Spain, and communicated by her to him. The letter describing it was written without any knowledge of his mishap, and arrived just in time to save his life.¹ And Pliny was himself induced by a dream to undertake the history of the Roman campaigns in Germany.² Religious believers naturally put at least equal confidence in what they imagined to be revelations of the divine will. Galen, the great physician, often allowed himself to be guided by dreams in the treatment of his patients, and had every reason to congratulate himself on the result. The younger Pliny, Suetonius, Dion Cassius, and the emperors Augustus and Marcus Aurelius, were all influenced in a similar manner; and among these Dion, who stands last in point of time, shows by his repeated allusions to the subject that superstition, so far from diminishing, was continually on the increase.³

It was natural that the best methods of interpreting so useful a source of information should be greatly sought after, and that they should be systematised in treatises expressly devoted to the subject. One such work, the *Oneirocritica* of Artemidôrus, is still extant. It was composed towards the end of the second century, as its author tells us, at the direct and repeated command of Apollo. According to Artemidôrus, the general belief in prophecy and in the existence of providence must stand or fall with the belief in prophetic dreams. He looked on the compilation of his work as the fulfilment of a religious mission, and his whole life was devoted to collecting the materials for it. His good faith is, we are told, beyond question, his industry is enormous, and he even exercises considerable discrimination in selecting and elucidating the phenomena which are represented to us as manifestations of a supernatural interest in human affairs. Thus his beliefs may be taken as a fair gauge of the extent to which educated opinion had at that time become infected with vulgar superstition.⁴

¹ Friedländer, iii., p. 533.

² *Ibid.*, p. 534.

³ For details see Friedländer, *loc. cit.*

⁴ Friedländer, pp. 535 *sqq.* This form of superstition still flourishes in great force among at least the lower class of Italians at the present day; and the continual stimulation afforded to it by the public lottery is not the least mischievous consequence of that infamous institution.

Dreams, like oracles, were occasionally employed for the conversion of infidels. An incident of the kind is related by Aelian, a writer who flourished early in the third century, and who is remarkable, even in that age, for his bigoted orthodoxy. A certain man named Euphronius, he tells us, whose delight was to study the blasphemous nonsense of Epicurus, fell very ill of consumption, and sought in vain for help from the skill of the physicians. He was already at death's door, when, as a last resource, his friends placed him in the temple of Asclêpius. There he dreamed that a priest came to him and said, 'This man's only chance of salvation is to burn the impious books of Epicurus, knead the ashes up with wax, and use the mixture as a poultice for his chest and stomach.' On awakening, he followed the divine prescription, was restored to health, and became a model of piety for the rest of his life. The same author gives us a striking instance of prayer answered, also redounding to the credit of Asclêpius, the object of whose favour is, however, on this occasion not a human being but a fighting-cock. The scene is laid at Tanagra, where the bird in question, having had his foot hurt, and evidently acting under the influence of divine inspiration, joins a choir who are singing the praises of Asclêpius, contributing his share to the sacred concert, and, to the best of his ability, keeping time with the other performers. 'This he did, standing on one leg and stretching out the other, as if to show its pitiable condition. So he sang to his saviour as far as the strength of his voice would permit, and prayed that he might recover the use of his limb.' The petition is granted, whereupon our hero claps his wings and struts about 'with outstretched neck and nodding crest like a proud warrior, thus proclaiming the power of providence over irrational animals.'¹

Aelian mentions other remarkable examples of the piety displayed by brutes. "Elephants worship the sun, stretching out their trunks to it like hands when it rises, while men doubt the existence of the gods, or at least their care for us." 'There is an island in the Black Sea, sacred to Heracles, where the mice touch nothing that belongs to the god. When the grapes which are intended to be used for his sacrifices begin to ripen, they quit the island in order to escape the temptation of nibbling at them, coming back when the vintage is over. Hippo, Diagoras, Herostratus, and other enemies of the gods would, no doubt, spare these grapes just as little as anything else that was consecrated to their use.'²

It is, perhaps, characteristic of the times that Aelian's stories should redound more especially to the credit of Asclêpius and Heracles, who were not gods of the first order, but demi-gods or deified mortals. Their worship, like that of the nature-powers

¹ Aelian, *Fragm.*, 98; Friedländer, p. 494.

² Friedländer, *loc. cit.*

connected with earth rather than with heaven, belongs particularly to the popular religion, and seems to have been repressed or restrained in societies organised on aristocratic principles. And as more immediate products of the forces by which supernaturalist beliefs are created and maintained, such divinities would profit by the free scope now given to popular predilections. In their case also, as with the earth-goddesses Dêmêtêr and Isis, a more immediate and affectionate relation might be established between the believer and the object of his worship than had been possible in reference to the chief Olympian gods. Heracles had lived the life of a man, his activity had been almost uniformly beneficent, and so he was universally invoked, as a helper and healer, in the sick-chamber no less than on the storm-tost ship.¹ Asclêpius was still more obviously the natural refuge of those who were afflicted with any bodily disease, and, in a time of profound peace, this was of all calamities the most likely to turn men's thoughts towards a supernatural protector. Hence we find that where, apart from Christianity, the religious enthusiasm of the second century reaches its intensest expression, which is in the writings of the celebrated rhetor Aristeides, Asclêpius comes in for the largest share of devotional feeling. During an illness which continued through thirteen years, Aristeides sought day and night for help and inspiration from the god. It came at last in the usual form of a prescription communicated through a dream. Both on this and on other occasions, the excitement of an overwrought imagination combined with an exorbitant vanity made the sophist believe himself to be preferred above all other men as an object of the divine favour. At one time he would see himself admitted in his dreams to an exchange of compliments with Asclêpius; at other times he would convert the most ordinary incidents into signs of supernatural protection. Thus his foster-sister having died on the day of his own recovery from a dangerous epidemic, it was revealed to him in a dream that her life had been accepted as a ransom for his. We are told that the monks of the Middle Ages could not refrain from expressing their indignant contempt for the insane credulity of Aristeides, in marginal notes on his orations; but the last-mentioned incident, at least, is closely paralleled by the well-known story that a devout lady was once permitted to redeem the life of Pius IX. by the sacrifice of her own.²

Besides this increasing reverence paid to the deified mortals of ancient mythology, the custom of bestowing divine honours on illustrious men after or even before their death, found new scope for its exercise under the empire. Among the manifestations

¹ Friedländer, p. 549.

² For the whole subject of Aristeides see Friedländer, pp. 496 *sqq.*

of this tendency, the apotheosis of the emperors themselves, of course, ranks first. We are accustomed to think of it as part of the machinery of despotism, surrounded by official ceremonies and enforced by cruel punishments ; but, in fact, it first originated in a spontaneous movement of popular feeling ; and in the case of Marcus Aurelius at least, it was maintained for a whole century, if not longer, by the mere force of public opinion. And many prophecies (which, as usual, came true) were made on the strength of revelations received from him in dreams.¹ But a much stronger proof of the prevalent tendency is furnished by the apotheosis of Antinous. In its origin this may be attributed to the caprice of a voluptuous despot ; but its perpetuation long after the motives of flattery or of fear had ceased to act, shows that the worship of a beautiful youth, who was believed to have given his life for another, satisfied a deep-seated craving of the age. It is possible that, in this and other instances, the deified mortal may have passed for the representative or incarnation of some god who was already believed to have led an earthly existence, and might therefore readily revisit the scene of his former activity. Thus Antinous constantly appears with the attributes of Dionysus ; and Apollonius of Tyana, the celebrated Pythagorean prophet of the first century, was worshipped at Ephesus in the time of Lactantius under the name of Heracles Alexicacus, that is, Heracles the defender from evil.²

VII

We now pass to a form of supernaturalism more characteristic than any other of the direction which men's thoughts were taking under the Roman empire, and more or less profoundly connected with all the other religious manifestations which have hitherto engaged our attention. This is the doctrine of immortality, a doctrine far more generally accepted in the first centuries of the Christian era, but quite apart from Christian influence, than is supposed by most persons. Here our most trustworthy information is derived from the epigraphic monuments. But for them, we might have continued to believe that public opinion on this subject was faithfully reflected by a

¹ 'Et parum sane fuit quod illi honores divinos, omnis aetas, omnis sexus, omnis condicio ac dignitas dedit, nisi quod etiam sacrilegus judicatus est qui ejus imaginem in suo domo non habuit qui per fortunam vel potuit habere vel debuit. Denique hodieque in multis domibus M. Aurelii statuæ consistunt inter deos penates. Nec defuerunt homines qui somniis eum multa praedixisse augurantes futura et vera concinnerunt.'—*Vita M. Antonini Phil.*, cap. xviii.

² Friedländer, p. 513.

few sceptical writers, who were, in truth, speaking only for themselves and for the numerically insignificant class to which they belonged. Not that the inscriptions all point one way and the books another way. On the contrary, there are epitaphs most distinctly repudiating the notion of a life beyond the grave, just as there are expressions let fall by men of learning which show that they accepted it as true. As much might be expected from the divisions then prevailing in the speculative world. Of all philosophical systems, Epicureanism was, at this time, the most widely diffused: its adherents rejected the belief in another world as a mischievous delusion; and many of them seem to have carefully provided that their convictions should be recorded on their tombs. The monument of one such philosopher, dedicated to eternal sleep, is still extant; others are dedicated to safe repose; others, again, speak of the opposite belief as a vain imagination. A favourite epitaph with persons of this school runs as follows:—‘I was nothing and became, I was and am no more, so much is true. To speak otherwise is to lie, for I shall be no more.’¹ Sometimes, from the depths of their unconsciousness, the dead are made to express indifference to the loss of existence. Sometimes, in what was popularly believed to be the spirit of Epicureanism, but was, in reality, most alien to it, they exhort the passer-by to indulge his appetites freely, since death is the end of all.

It must further be noted that disbelief in a future life, as a philosophical principle, was not confined to the Epicureans. All philosophers except the Platonists and Pythagoreans were materialists; and no logical thinker who had once applied his mind to the subject could accept such an absurdity as the everlasting duration of a complex corporeal substance, whether consisting of gaseous or of fiery matter. A majority of the Stoics allowed the soul to continue its individual existence until, in common with the whole world, it should be reabsorbed into the elemental fire; but others looked forward to a more speedy extinction, without ceasing on that account to consider themselves orthodox members of the school. Of these the most remarkable instance is Marcus Aurelius. The great emperor was not blind to what seemed the enormous injustice of death, and did not quite see his way to reconciling it with the Stoic belief in a beneficent providence; but the difficulty of finding room for so many ghosts, and perhaps also the Heracleitean dogma of perpetual transformation, led him to renounce whatever hope he may at one time have cherished of entering on a new existence in some better

¹ Friedländer, iii., p. 683. Cp. Clifford's epitaph: ‘I was nothing and was conceived; I loved and did a little work; I am nothing and grieve not.’

world.¹ A similar consequence was involved in the principles of the Peripatetic philosophy; and Alexander of Aphrodisias, the famous Aristotelian commentator, who flourished about 200 A.D., affirms the perishable nature of the soul on his own account, and, with perfect justice, attributes the same belief to Aristotle himself.²

Among the scientific and literary men who were not pledged to any particular school, we find the elder Pliny rejecting the belief in immortality, not only as irrational but as the reverse of consolatory. It robs us, he declares, of nature's most especial boon, which is death, and doubles the pangs of dissolution by the prospect of continued existence elsewhere.³ Quintilian leaves the question undecided;⁴ Tacitus expresses himself doubtfully;⁵ and Galen, whose great physiological knowledge enabled him to see how fallacious were Plato's arguments, while his philosophical training equally separated him from the materialists, also refuses to pronounce in favour of either side.⁶ What Juvenal thought is uncertain; but, from his general tone, we may conjecture that he leant to the negative side.⁷

Against these we have to set the confident expressions of belief in a future life employed by all the Platonists and Pythagoreans, and by some of the Stoic school. But their doctrines on the subject will be most advantageously explained when we come to deal with the religious philosophy of the age as a whole. What we have now to examine is the general condition of popular belief as evinced by the character of the funereal monuments erected in the time of the empire. Our authorities are agreed in stating that the majority of these bear witness to a widespread and ever-growing faith in immortality, sometimes conveyed under the form of inscriptions, sometimes under that of figured reliefs, sometimes more naïvely signified by articles placed in the tomb for use in another world. 'I am waiting for my husband,' is the inscription placed over his dead wife by one who was, like her, an enfranchised slave. Elsewhere a widow 'commends her departed husband to the gods of the underworld, and prays that they will allow his spirit to revisit her in the hours of the night.'⁸ 'In death thou art not dead,' are the words deciphered on one mouldering stone. 'No,' says a father to a son whom he had lost in Numidia, 'thou hast not gone down to the abode of the Manes but risen to the stars of heaven.' At Doxato, near Philippi in Macedonia, 'a mother

¹ *Comm.*, iv., 21; xii., 5, 26.

² Quoted by Friedländer, pp. 681 sq.

³ Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 828.

⁴ Friedländer, i., pp. 465 sq.

⁵ Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., I, p. 798.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 688. ⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See in particular, *Satt.*, ii., 149.

has graven on the tomb of her child: "We are crushed by a cruel blow, but thou hast renewed thy being and art dwelling in the Elysian fields."'¹ This conception of the future world as a heavenly and happy abode where human souls are received into the society of the gods, recurs with especial frequency in the Greek epitaphs, but is also met with in Latin-speaking countries. And, considering how great a part the worship of departed spirits plays in all primitive religions, just such a tendency might be expected to show itself at such a time, if, as I have contended, the conditions of society under the empire were calculated to set free the original forces by which popular faith is created. It seems, therefore, rather arbitrary to assume, as Friedländer does,² that the movement in question was entirely due to Platonic influence,—especially considering that there are distinct traces of it to be found in Pindar ;—although at the same time we may grant that it was powerfully fostered by Plato's teaching, and received a fresh impulse from the reconstitution of his philosophy in the third century of our era.

Side by side, however, with these exalted aspirations, the old popular belief in a subterranean abode of souls survived under its very crudest forms ; and here also modern explorations have brought to light very surprising evidence of the strength with which the grotesque idea of Charon the Stygian ferryman still kept its hold on the imagination of uneducated people. Originally peculiar to Greece, where it still exists under a slightly altered form, this superstition penetrated into the West at a comparatively early period. Thus in the tombs of Campania alone many hundred skeletons have been found with bronze coins in their mouths, placed there to pay their passage across the Styx ; and explorations at Praeneste show that this custom reaches back to the middle of the fourth century B.C. We also learn from Lucian that, in his time, the old animistic beliefs were entertained to the extent of burning or burying the clothes, ornaments, and other appurtenances of deceased persons along with their bodies, under the idea that the owners required them for use in the other world ; and it is to such deposits that our museums of classical antiquity owe the greater part of their contents.³

When the belief in a future life assumes the form last mentioned, it is, as I have said, simply a survival of the most primitive animism, not testifying to any religious reaction at the time when it can be proved to have flourished. It is introduced in the present connexion merely to show what ideas were current among those classes to whose opinions Roman

¹ Duruy, *Hist. d. Rom.*, v., p. 463.

² iii., p. 692.

³ Friedländer, iii., p. 701 ; Rohde, *Psyche*, p. 627 (1st ed.).

civilisation was gradually giving irresistible weight. How the minds of the richer and more educated classes were affected by this underlying stratum, is shown by the nature of the figured representations with which their last abodes were ornamented. Every one has been made tolerably familiar with these through the sculptured sarcophagi preserved in our museums ; but, from their symbolical character, the significance of the reliefs with which they are decorated is not obvious at first sight ; and some of the mythical adventures thus embodied may have been wrought without any reference to the destination of the dark and narrow chamber which they enclosed, or may even have been intended to divert the imagination from sad thoughts by the luxuriance of rushing life and joy and victory which they displayed ; but after making every possible deduction on this score, there remain many others offering a deeper source of consolation to the bereaved survivor by the pictured promise of future reunion with those whom he had loved and lost. One favourite subject is the visit of Diana to the sleeping Endymion, by which is clearly foreshadowed an awakening to divine felicity from the sleep of death. The rape of Proserpine, followed by her restoration to the upper world, conveys a similar intention ; as also does the fate of Adonis, since he too was believed to have risen from the dead. The marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne unquestionably symbolises the exchange of an earthly for a heavenly life ; and the scenes of Bacchic revelry with which the interior of some tombs is decorated, were, to the imagination of those who designed them, no unbecoming image of the joys awaiting a blessed soul in its celestial abode. An inscription of which I have already quoted the opening words expresses in terms that hope of companionship with the joyous band of Dionysus at which the plastic representations can but mutely hint. ‘Now in a flowery meadow,’ says the mourning mother of Doxato to her child, ‘the priestess marked with a sacred seal is enrolling thee in the troop of Bacchus, where the Naiads that bear the sacred baskets claim thee as their fellow to lead the solemn procession by the light of torches.’ At the same time, a tenderer or graver note is often struck. The stories of Admêtus and Alcestis, of Protesilaus and Laodameia, point to a renewal of conjugal love beyond the grave. What were formerly supposed to be scenes representing the eternal farewell of husband and wife are, in the opinion of modern archaeologists, pictures of their restoration to each other’s arms. Rising higher still, Achilles among the daughters of Lycomêdes probably typifies the liberation of an immortal spirit from the seductions of sense. The labours of Heracles recall his apotheosis, and seem to show that a life of noble effort shall be rewarded hereafter. The battle of the Amazons is an allegory of strife with and triumph over the

temptations of earthly delight. Another often-recurring theme, the hunting of the Calydonian boar, may mean the soul's victory over death; but this explanation is offered only as a conjecture of the present writer's.

A remarkable circumstance connected with the evidence afforded by the figured monuments is its progressive character. According to Ravaisson, 'As time goes on, the indications of belief in a future life, instead of becoming fainter, grow clearer and more distinct. More and more exalted ideas are formed of the soul's destiny, and ever increasing honours are paid to the dead. Moreover, these ideas and practices are extended so as to cover a greater number of individuals. At first it would seem that the only persons whose fate excites any interest are kings and heroes, the children or the descendants of the gods; in the course of time many others, and at last all, or nearly all, are admitted to a share in the same regard. The ancient principle that happiness is reserved for those who resemble the gods remains unchanged; but the notion of what constitutes resemblance to the gods, or in other words perfection, gradually becomes so modified, that all men may aspire to reach it.'¹

We are here in presence of a phenomenon like that to which attention was invited in the first chapter of this work.² The belief in immortality, entertained under a gloomy and repulsive form by the uneducated, is taken up by the higher classes, brought into contact with their more generous ideas, broadened, deepened, purified, and finally made the basis of a new religion. Nevertheless, in the present instance at least, all was not clear gain; and the faith which smiles on us from storied sarcophagus and mural relief, or pleads for our sympathy in epitaphs more enduring than the hope which they enshrine, had also its grotesque and hideous side, for an expression of which we must turn to literature again.

Once credited with a continued existence, the departed spirit would not remain in the Hades or the Elysium provided for it by the justice or the piety of the survivor, but persisted in returning to this world and manifesting a most uncomfortable

¹ 'A mesure que le temps s'avance les traits par lesquels se produit la croyance à une autre vie, d'abord vagues et confus, loin de s'effacer, se prononcent et se précisent. On se fait de la destinée des âmes des idées de plus en plus hautes; on rend aux morts des honneurs de plus en plus grands. En outre, ces idées, ces pratiques s'étendent de plus en plus au grand nombre. Au commencement il semble qu'on ne s'inquiète que du sort des rois et des héros, enfants ou descendants directs des dieux; avec le temps beaucoup d'autres ont part aux mêmes préoccupations, puis tous ou presque tous. La félicité est réservée à qui ressemble aux dieux; c'est une maxime antique qui subsiste immuable. Avec le temps on se fait de la ressemblance avec les dieux ou, ce qui revient au même, de la perfection, des idées qui permettent à tous d'y prétendre.' Ravaisson, *Le Monument de Myrrhine et les bas-reliefs funéraires*, 1876, quoted by Duruy, *op. cit.*, p. 463; cp. Rohde, *Psyche*, pp. 646 sqq.

² *Supra*, p. II.

interest in its affairs ; or, even if willing to remain at rest, it was liable to be dragged back by incantations, and compelled to reveal the secrets of futurity at the bidding of an unprincipled magician. What science and good feeling combined have proved unable to keep down among ourselves, naturally raged with unmitigated virulence at a time when the primitive barbarism and superstition were only covered over by a crust of culture which at many points was growing thinner every day. Among Latin writers, the younger Pliny, Suetonius, and Apuleius, among Greek writers, Plutarch, Pausanias, Maximus Tyrius, Philostratus, and Dion Cassius, afford unequivocal evidence of their belief and the belief of their contemporaries in ghostly apparitions ; and Lucian, while rejecting ghost-stories on his own account, speaks as if they were implicitly accepted even in philosophical circles.¹ Still more abundant is the evidence proving the frequency of attempts made to evoke spirits by means of magical incantations. Horace's Canidia boasts that she can raise the dead even after their bodies have been burned.² Lucan describes the process of conjuring up a ghost at length ; and it is thought that he inserted the whole scene in his poem as a satire on the emperor Nero, who is known to have been addicted to such practices, as were also his successors, Didius Julianus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus. And that the same art was cultivated by private persons is clear from the allusions made to it by Quintilian, Apuleius, Tertullian, and Heliodôrus.³

VIII

We have now to consider how the philosophy of the empire was affected by the atmosphere of supernaturalism which surrounded it on every side. Of the Epicureans it need only be said that they were true to their trust, and upheld the principles of their founder so long as the sect itself continued to exist. But we may reckon it as a first consequence of the religious reaction, that, after Lucretius, Epicureanism failed to secure the adhesion of a single eminent thinker, and that, even as a popular philosophy, it suffered by the competition of other systems, among which Stoicism long maintained the foremost place. It was shown in a former chapter how strong a religious colouring was given to their teaching by the earlier Stoics, especially Cleanthes. It would appear, however, that Panaetius discarded many of the superstitions accepted by his predecessors, possibly as a concession to that revived Scepticism which was so vigorously advocated just before his time ;

¹ For references see Friedländer, iii., pp. 706 *sqq.* ; Rohde, 651 *sqq.*

² *Epod.*, xvii., 79.

³ Friedländer, pp. 710 *sq.*

and it was under the form imposed on it by this philosopher that Stoicism first gained acceptance in Roman society; if indeed the rationalism of Panaetius was not itself partly determined by his intercourse with such liberal minds as Laelius and the younger Scipio. But Posidonius, his successor, already marks the beginning of a reactionary movement; and, in Vergil, Stoical opinions are closely associated with an unquestioning acceptance of the ancient Roman faith. The attitude of Seneca is much more independent; he is full of contempt for popular superstition, and his God is not very distinguishable from the order of nature. Yet his tendency towards clothing philosophical instruction in religious terms deserves notice, as a symptom of the superior facility with which such terms lent themselves to didactic purposes. Acceptance of the universal order became more intelligible under the name of obedience to a divine decree; the unity of the human race and the obligations resulting therefrom impressed themselves more deeply on the imaginations of those who heard that men are all members of one body; the supremacy of reason over appetite became more assured when its dictates were interpreted as the voice of a god within the soul.¹

The religious tendency of Seneca's philosophy appears rather in his psychology than in his metaphysics, in the stress which he lays on human immortality rather than in his discussions on creation and divine providence. His statements on this subject are not, indeed, very consistent, death being sometimes spoken of as the end of consciousness, and at other times as the beginning of a new life, the 'birthday of eternity,' to quote a phrase afterwards adopted by Christian preachers. Nor can we be absolutely certain that the promised eternity is not merely another way of expressing the soul's absorption into and identification with the fiery element whence it was originally derived. This, however, is an ambiguity to be met with in other doctrines of a spiritual existence after death, nor is it entirely absent from the language even of Christian theologians. What deserves attention is that, whether the future life spoken of by Seneca be taken in a literal or in a figurative sense, it is equally intended to lead our thoughts away from the world of sensible experience to a more ideal order of things; and, to that extent, it falls in with the more general religious movement of the age. Whether Zeller is, for that reason, justified in speaking of him as a Platonising Stoic seems more questionable; for the Stoics always agreed with Plato in holding that the soul is distinct from and superior to the body, and that it is consubstantial with the animating principle of nature. The same circumstances which

¹ Sen., *Epp.*, xvi., 5; xcvi., 52; xli., 1 and 2.

were elsewhere leading to a revival of Platonism, equally tended to develope this side of Stoicism, but it seems needless to seek for a closer connexion between the two phenomena.¹

On passing from Seneca to Epictëtus, we find that the religious element has received a considerable accession of strength, so considerable, indeed, that the simple progress of time will not altogether account for it. Something is due to the superior devoutness of the Eastern mind—Epictëtus was a Phrygian,—and still more to the difference in station between the two philosophers. As a noble, Seneca belonged to the class which was naturally most inclined to adopt an independent attitude towards the popular beliefs; as a slave, Epictëtus belonged to the class which was naturally most amenable to their authority. It was, however, no accident that philosophy should, at a distance of only a generation, be represented by two such widely contrasted individuals; for the whole tendency of Roman civilization was, as we have seen, to bring the Oriental element and the servile element of society into ever-increasing prominence. Nothing proves the ascendancy of religious considerations in the mind of Epictëtus more strongly than his aversion from the physical enquiries which were eagerly prosecuted by Seneca. Nature interests him solely as a manifestation of divine wisdom and goodness. As a consequence of this intensified religious feeling, the Stoic theory of natural law is transformed, with Epictëtus, into an expression of filial submission to the divine will; while the Stoic teleology becomes an enumeration of the blessings showered by providence on man. In the latter respect, his standpoint approaches very near to that of Socrates, who, although a free-born Athenian citizen, belonged, like him, to the poorer classes, and sympathised deeply with their feeling of dependence on supernatural protection,—a remark which also applies to the humble day-labourer Cleanthes. Epictëtus also shares the idea, characteristic of the Platonic rather than of the Xenophontic Socrates, that the philosopher is entrusted with a mission from God, without which it would be perilous for him to undertake the office of a teacher, and which, in the discharge of that office, he should keep constantly before his eyes. But the dialectical element,

¹ Perhaps, however, Zeller's contention amounts to no more than that Seneca follows Posidonius in his adoption of the Platonic distinction between reason and passion, which were identified by the other Stoics. But the object of the latter was apparently to save the personality of man, which seemed to be threatened by Plato's tripartite division of mind; and as Seneca achieves the same result by including the passions in the ἡγεμονικόν (*Epp.*, xcii. 1—Zeller by mistake refers to *Epp.*, xciv. in *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 1, p. 711, note 8) the difference between him and them is after all little more than verbal. For the general attitude of Seneca towards religion see Gaston Boissier, *Religion Romaine*, ii., pp. 63–92.

which with Socrates had furnished so strong a counterpoise to the authoritative and traditional side of his philosophy, is almost entirely wanting in the discourses of his imitator, and the little of it that he admits is valued only as a means of silencing the Sceptics. On the other hand, the weakness and insignificance of human nature, considered on the individual side, are abundantly illustrated, and contemptuous diminutives are habitually used in speaking of its component parts.¹ It would seem that the attitude of prostration before an overwhelming external authority prevented Epictêtus from looking very favourably on the doctrine of individual immortality; and even if he accepted that doctrine, which seems in the highest degree improbable, it held a much less important place in his thoughts than in those of Cicero and Seneca. It would seem, also, that the Stoic materialism was betraying its fundamental incompatibility with a hope originally borrowed from the idealism of Plato. Nor was this renunciation inconsistent with the ethical dualism which drew a sharp line of distinction between flesh and spirit in the constitution of man, for the superiority of the spirit arose from its identity with the divine substance into which it was destined to be reabsorbed after death.²

If, in the philosophy of Epictêtus, physics and morality become entirely identified with religion, religion, on the other hand, remains entirely natural and moral. It is an offering not of prayer but of praise, a service less of ceremonies and sacrifices than of virtuous deeds, a study of conscience rather than of prophecy, a faith not so much in supernatural portents as in providential law.³ But in arriving at Marcus Aurelius, we have overstepped the line that divides rational religion from superstition. Instances of the good emperor's astonishing credulity have already been given and need not be repeated. They are enough to show that his lavish expenditure on public worship was dictated by something more than a regard for established customs. We know, indeed, that the hecatombs with which his victories were celebrated gave occasion to profane merriment even in the society of that period. On one occasion, a petition was passed from hand to hand, purporting to be addressed to the emperor by the white oxen, and deprecating his success on the ground that if he won they were lost.⁴ Yet the same Marcus Aurelius, in speaking of his predecessor Antoninus, expressly specifies piety without superstition as one of the traits in his character which were most deserving of

¹ As ψυχάριον, σωμάριον, σαρκίδιον.

² Epict., *Fragm.*, 175; *Diss.*, i., 16, 1-8; ii., 16, 42; iii., 22, 2; 24, 91-94. Zeller, iii., 1, p. 742.

³ Zeller, p. 745.

⁴ Friedländer, iii., p. 493.

imitation.¹ And, undoubtedly, the mental condition of those who were continually in an agony of fear lest they should incur the divine displeasure by some purely arbitrary act or omission, or who supposed that the gods might be bribed into furthering their iniquitous enterprises, was beyond all comparison farther removed from true wisdom than the condition of those who believed themselves to be favoured by particular manifestations of the divine beneficence, perhaps as a recompense for their earnest attempts to lead a just and holy life. We may conclude, then, that philosophy, while injuriously affected by the supernaturalist movement, still protected its disciples against the more virulent forms of superstition, and by entering into combination with the popular belief, raised it to a higher level of feeling and of thought. It was not, however, by Stoicism that the final reconciliation of ancient religion with philosophy could be accomplished, but by certain older forms of speculation which we now proceed to study.

In the preceding chapter I attempted to show that the tendency of Roman thought, when brought into contact with the Greek systems, was to resolve them into their component elements, or to throw them back on their historical antecedents. As a result of this dissolving process, the Stoicism of the second century split up into a number of more or less conflicting principles, each of which received exclusive prominence according to the changeful mood of the thinker who resorted to philosophy for consolation or for help. Stoicism had originally embraced the dynamism of Heracleitus, the teleology of Socrates, the physical morality of Prodicus and his Cynic successors, the systematising dialectic of Aristotle, the psychism of Plato and the Pythagoreans, and, to a certain extent, the superstitions of popular mythology. With Epic-tétus, we find the Cynic and the Socratic elements most clearly developed, with Marcus Aurelius, the Socratic and the Heracleitean, the latter being especially strong in the meditations written shortly before his death. In the eastern provinces of the empire, Cynicism was preached as an independent system of morality, and obtained great success by its popular and propagandist character. Dion Chrysostom, a much-admired lecturer of the second century, speaks with enthusiasm of its most famous representative Diogenes, and recounts, with evident gusto, some of the most shameless actions attributed, perhaps falsely, to that eccentric philosopher.² And the popular rhetorician Maximus Tyrius, although a professed Platonist, places the Cynic life above every other.³ But the traditions of Cynicism were thoroughly opposed to the prevalent polytheism; and its whole attitude was

¹ *Comm.*, vi. 30.

² *Oratt.*, vi., p. 203 R.

³ *Diss.*, xxxvi., 6

calculated to repel rather than to attract minds penetrated with the enthusiastic spirit of the age. To all such the Neo-Pythagorean doctrine came as a welcome revelation.

After its temporary adoption by the Academy, Pythagoreanism had ceased to exist as an independent system, but continued to lead a sort of underground life in connexion with the Orphic and Dionysiac mysteries. When or where it reappeared under a philosophical form cannot be certainly determined. Zeller fixes on the beginning of the first century B.C. as the most probable date, and on Alexandria as the most probable scene of its renewed speculative activity.¹ Some fifty years later, we find Pythagorean teachers in Rome, and traces of their influence are plainly discernible in the Augustan literature. Under its earliest form, the new system was an attempt to combine mathematical mysticism with principles borrowed from the Stoic and other philosophies; or perhaps it was simply a return to the poetical syncretism of Empedocles. Although composed of fire and air, the soul is declared to be immortal; and lessons of holiness are accompanied by an elaborate code of rules for ceremonial purification. The elder Sextius, from whom Seneca derived much of his ethical enthusiasm, probably belonged to this school. He taught a morality apparently identical with that of Stoicism in every point except the inculcation of abstinence from animal food.² To this might be added the practice of nightly self-confession—an examination from the moral point of view of how one's whole day has been spent,—were we certain that the Stoics did not originate it for themselves.³

The alliance between Neo-Pythagoreanism and Stoicism did not last long. Their fundamental principles were too radically opposed to admit of any reconciliation, except what could be affected by the absorption of both into a more comprehensive system. And Roman Stoicism, at least, was too practical, too scientific, too sane, to assimilate what must have seemed a curious amalgam of mathematical jugglery and dreamy asceticism; while the reputation of belonging to what passed for a secret society would be regarded with particular dread in the vicinity of the imperial court—it was, in fact, for this particular reason that the elder Seneca persuaded his son to renounce the vegetarian diet which Sotion had induced him to adopt—and the suspicious hostility of the public authorities may have had something to do with the speedy disappearance of Neo-Pythagoreanism from Rome.⁴ On the other hand, so coarsely materialistic and utilitarian a doctrine as that of the Porch, must have been equally repulsive

¹ *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, pp. 88 *sqq.*

² Seneca, *De Ira*, iii., 36, 2

³ Seneca, *Ep.*, lxiv., 2; cviii., 17.

⁴ Seneca, *Ep.*, cviii., 22.

to the spiritualism which, while it discerned a deep kinship permeating all forms of animal existence, saw in the outward conditions of that existence only the prison or the tomb where a heaven-born exile lay immured in expiation of the guilt that had driven him from his former and well-nigh forgotten abode. Hence, after Seneca, we find the two schools pursuing divergent directions, the naturalism of the one becoming more and more contrasted with the spiritualism of the other. It has been mentioned how emphatically Marcus Aurelius rejected the doctrine of a future life, which, perhaps, had been brought under his notice as a tenet of the Neo-Pythagoreans. The latter, on their side, abandoned the Stoic cosmology for the more congenial metaphysics of Plato, which they enriched with some elements from Aristotle's system, but without in the least acknowledging their obligations to those two illustrious masters. On the contrary, they professed to derive their hidden wisdom from certain alleged writings of Pythagoras and his earlier disciples, which, with the disregard for veracity not uncommon among mystics, they did not scruple to forge wholesale. As a consequence of their unfortunate activity, literature was encumbered with a mass of worthless productions, of which many fragments still survive, mixed, perhaps, with some genuine relics of old Italiote speculation, the extrication of which is, however, a task of almost insuperable difficulty.

It is only as a religious philosophy that Neo-Pythagoreanism can interest us here. Considered in this light, the principles of its adherents may be summed up under two heads. First, they taught the separate existence of spirit as opposed to matter. Unlike the Stoics, they distinguished between God and nature, although they were not agreed as to whether their Supreme Being transcended the world or was immanent in it. This, however, did not interfere with their fundamental contention, for either alternative is consistent with his absolute immateriality. In like manner, the human soul is absolutely independent of the body which it animates; it has existed and will continue to exist for ever. The whole object of ethics, or rather of religion, is to enforce and illustrate this independence, to prevent the soul from becoming attached to its prison-house by indulgence in sensual pleasures, to guard its habitation against defiling contact with the more offensive forms of material impurity. Hence their recommendation of abstinence from wine, from animal food, and from marriage, their provisions for personal cleanliness, their use of linen instead of woollen garments, under the idea that a vegetable is purer than an animal tissue. }The second article of the Pythagorean creed is that spirit, being superior to matter, has the power of interfering with and controlling its movements,

that, being above space and time, it can be made manifest without any regard to the conditions which they ordinarily impose. To what an extent this belief was carried, is shown by the stories told of Pythagoras, the supposed founder of the school, and of Apollonius of Tyana, its still greater representative in the first century of our era. Both were credited with an extraordinary power of working miracles and of predicting future events; but, contrary to the usual custom of mythologers, a larger measure of this power was ascribed to the one who lived in a more advanced state of civilisation, and the composition of whose biography was separated by a comparatively short interval from the events which it professes to relate.¹

IX

The most important result of the old Pythagorean teaching was that it contributed a large element—somewhat too large, indeed,—to Plato's philosophy. Neo-Pythagoreanism bears precisely the same relation to that revived Platonism which was the last outcome of ancient thought. It will be remembered that the great controversy between Stoicism and Scepticism, which for centuries divided the schools of Athens, and was passed on by them to Cicero and his contemporaries, seemed tending towards a reconciliation based on a return to the founder of the Academy, when, from whatever cause, Greek speculation came to a halt, which continued until the last third of the first century after Christ. At that epoch, we find a great revival of philosophical interest, and this revival seems to have been maintained for at least a hundred years, that is to say, through the whole of what is called the age of the Antonines. In the struggle for existence among the rival sects which ensued, Platonism started with all the advantages that a great inheritance and a great name could bestow. At the commencement of this period, we find the Academy once more professing to hold the doctrines of its founder in their original purity and completeness. Evidently the sober common-sense view of Antiochus had been discarded, and Plato's own writings were taken as an authoritative standard of truth. A series of industrious commentators undertook the task of elucidating their contents. Nor was it only in the schools that their influence was felt. The beauty of their style must have strongly recommended the *Dialogues* to the attention of literary men. Plutarch, the most considerable Greek writer of his time, was a declared Platonist. So

¹ For a detailed account of the Neo-Pythagorean school, see Zeller, *op. cit.*, iii., 2, pp. 79-158, from which the above summary is entirely derived.

also was the brilliant African novelist, Apuleius, who flourished under Marcus Aurelius. Celsus, the celebrated anti-Christian controversialist, and Maximus, the Tyrian rhetorician, professed the same allegiance; and the illustrious physiologist Galen shows traces of Platonic influence. Platonism, as first constituted, had been an eminently religious philosophy, and its natural tendencies were still further strengthened at the period of its revival by the great religious reaction which we have been studying in the present chapter; while, conversely, in the struggle for supremacy among rival systems, its affinities with the spirit of the age gave it an immense advantage over the sceptical and materialistic philosophies, which brought it into still closer sympathy with the currents of popular opinion. And its partisans were drawn even further in the same direction by the influence of Neo-Pythagoreanism, representing, as this did, one among the three or four leading principles that Plato had attempted to combine.

The chief theological doctrines held in common by the two schools, were the immortality of the soul and the existence of daemons. These were supposed to form a class of spiritual beings, intermediate between gods and men, and sharing to some extent in the nature of both. According to Plutarch, though very long-lived, they are not immortal; and he quotes the famous story about the death of Pan in proof of his assertion;¹ but, in this respect, his opinion is not shared by Maximus Tyrius,² who expressly declares them to be immortal; and, indeed, one hardly sees how the contrary could have been maintained consistently with Platonic principles; for, if the human soul never dies, much less can spirits of a higher rank be doomed to extinction. As a class, the daemons are morally imperfect beings, subject to human passions, and capable of wrong-doing. Like men also, they are divided into good and bad. The former kind perform providential and retributive offices on behalf of the higher gods, inspiring oracles, punishing crime, and succouring distress. Those who permit themselves to be influenced by improper motives in the discharge of their appointed functions, are degraded to the condition of human beings. The bad and morose sort are propitiated by a gloomy and self-tormenting worship.³ By means of the imperfect character thus ascribed to the daemons, a way was found for reconciling the purified theology of Platonism with the old Greek religion. To each of the higher deities there is attached,

¹ *De Defect. Orac.*, xvii., p. 419. It was from this sense of the word daemon that Goethe derived his famous notion of a daemonic power in the world, transcending nature and especially manifested in men of genius, but not necessarily making either for moral good or moral evil.

² *Diss.*, xv., 2.

³ Plutarch, *De Is. et Osir.*, xxv. and xxvi.; *De Fac. in Orbe Lun.*, xxx.

we are told, a daemon who bears his name and is frequently confounded with him. The immoral or unworthy actions narrated of the old gods were, in reality, the work of their inferior namesakes. This theory was adopted by the Fathers of the Church, with the difference, however, that they altogether suppressed the higher class of Platonic powers, and identified the daemons with the fallen angels of their own mythology. This is the reason why a word which was not originally used in a bad sense has come to be synonymous with the devil.

It was in perfect accordance with the spirit of Greek philosophy, and more particularly of Platonism, that a connecting link should be interposed between earth and heaven, the human and the divine, especially when, as at this time, the supreme creator had come to be isolated in solitary splendour from the rest of existence; but it would be a mistake to suppose that the daemons were invented for the purpose to which they were applied. We find them mentioned by Hesiod;¹ and they probably represent an even older phase of religious thought than the Olympian gods, being, in fact, a survival of that primitive psychism which peopled the whole universe with life and animation. This becomes still clearer when we consider that they are described, both under their earliest and their latest Greek form, as being, in part at least, human souls raised after death to a higher sphere of activity. Among these, Maximus Tyrius includes the demi-gods of mythology, such as Asclêpius and Heracles, who, as we have seen, were objects of particular veneration under the empire.² Thus daemon-worship combined three different elements or aspects of the supernaturalist movement:—the free play given to popular imagination by the decay or destruction of the aristocratic organisation of society and religion; the increasing tendency to look for a perpetuation and elevation of human existence; and the convergence of philosophical speculation with popular faith.

Daemonism, however, does not fill a very great place in the creed of Plutarch; and a comparison of him with his successors shows that the saner traditions of Greek thought only gradually gave way to the rising flood of ignorance and unreason. It is true that, as a moralist, the philosopher of Chaeronea considered religion of inestimable importance to human virtue and human happiness; while, as a historian, he accepted stories of supernatural occurrences with a credulity recalling that of Livy and falling little short of Dion Cassius. Nor did his own Platonistic monotheism prevent him from extending a very generous intellectual toleration to the different forms of polytheism which he found everywhere prevailing.³ In this respect, he and

¹ *Op. et D.*, 123 (Paley). ² *Diss.*, xv., 7. ³ Zeller, iii., 2, pp. 189 *sqq.*

probably all the philosophers of that and the succeeding age, the Epicureans, the Sceptics, and some of the Cynics alone excepted, offer a striking contradiction to one of Gibbon's most celebrated epigrams. To them the popular religions were not equally false but equally true, and, to a certain extent, equally useful. Where Plutarch drew the line was at what he called *Deisidaimonia*, the frightful mental malady which, as already mentioned, began to afflict Greece soon after the conquests of Alexander. It is generally translated superstition, but has a much narrower meaning. It expresses the beliefs and feelings of one who lives in perpetual dread of provoking supernatural vengeance, not by wrongful behaviour towards his fellow-men, nor even by intentional disrespect towards a higher power, but by the neglect of certain ceremonial observances; and who is constantly on the look-out for heaven-sent prognostications of calamities, which, when they come, will apparently be inflicted from sheer ill-will. Plutarch has devoted one of his most famous essays to the castigation of this weakness. He deliberately prefers atheism to it, showing by an elaborate comparison of instances that the former—with which, however, he has no sympathy at all—is much less injurious to human happiness, and involves much less real impiety, than such a constant attribution of meaningless malice to the gods. One example of *Deisidaimonia* adduced by Plutarch is Sabbatarianism, especially when carried, as it had recently been by the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem, to the point of entirely suspending military operations on the day of rest.¹ That the belief in daemons, some of whom passed for being malevolent powers, might yield a fruitful crop of new superstitions, does not seem to have occurred to Plutarch; still less that the doctrine of future torments of which, following Plato's example, he was a firm upholder, might prove a terror to others besides offenders against the moral law—especially when manipulated by a class whose interest it was to stimulate the feeling in question to the utmost possible intensity.

When we pass from Plutarch to Maximus Tyrius and Apuleius, the darkness grows perceptibly thicker, and is no longer broken by the *lucida tela diei* with which the Theban thinker had combated at least one class of mistaken beliefs. These writers are so occupied with developing the positive aspects of supernaturalism—daemonology, divination, and thaumaturgy—that they can find no place for a protest against its extravagances and perversions; nor is their mysticism balanced by those extensive applications of philosophy to real life, whether under the form of biography or of discourses on practical morality, which enabled Plutarch's mind to preserve an attitude of

¹ *De Superstit.*, viii., p. 169.

comparative sobriety and calmness. Hence while Maximus is absolutely forgotten, and Apuleius remembered only as an amusing story-teller, Plutarch has been perhaps the most successful interpreter between Greek humanity and modern thought. His popularity has long been declining, but the influence exercised by his writings on characters differing so much from one another and from his own as those of Montaigne, Rousseau, and Wordsworth, suffices to prove, if any proof be needed, how deep and wide were the sympathies which they once evoked.

What progress devotional feeling had made during the interval which separated Apuleius from Plutarch and his school, may be illustrated by a comparison of the terms which they respectively employ in reference to the Egyptian Isis. The author of the treatise on Isis and Osiris identifies the goddess with the female or material, as distinguished from the formative principle in nature; which, to say the least of it, is not giving her a very exalted rank in the scheme of creation. Apuleius, on the other hand, addresses her, or makes his hero address her, in the following enthusiastic language:—

Holy everlasting Saviour of the human race! Bounteous nurse of mortals! Tender mother of the afflicted! Not for a day or night nor even for one little moment dost thou relax thy care for men, driving away the storms of life and stretching forth to them the right hand of deliverance, wherewith thou dost unravel even the tangled threads of fate, soothe the storms of fortune, and restrain the hurtful courses of the stars. The gods above adore thee, the gods below respect; thou dost cause the heavens to roll, the sun to shine; the world thou rulest, and treadest Tartarus underfoot. To thee the stars reply, for thee the seasons come again; in thee the deities rejoice, and thee the elements obey. At thy nod the breezes blow, the clouds drop fatness, the seeds germinate and seedlings spring. But my wit is small to celebrate thy praises, my fortune poor to pay thee sacrifices, the abundance of my voice does not suffice to tell what I think of thy majesty, nor would a thousand tongues nor an unwearied and everlasting flow of speech. Therefore what alone religion joined to poverty can achieve, I will provide: an image of thy divine countenance and most holy godhead, guarded for perpetual contemplation within the recesses of my heart.¹

Doubtless the cool intellect of a Greek and the fervid temperament of an African would always have expressed themselves in widely different accents. What we have to note is that the one was now taking the place of the other because the atmosphere had been heated up to a point as favourable to passion as it was fatal to thought.

After Apuleius, Platonism, outside the lecture rooms of Athens, becomes identified with Pythagoreanism, and both with

¹ *Metamorph.*, xi., 25.

dogmatic theology. In this direction, philosophy was feeling its way towards a reconciliation with two great Oriental religions, Hebrew monotheism and Medo-Persian dualism. The first advances had come from religion. Aristobulus, an Alexandrian Jew (B.C. 160), was apparently the first to detect an analogy between the later speculations of Plato and his own hereditary faith. Both taught that the world had been created by a single supreme God. Both were penetrated with the purest ethical ideas. Both associated sensuality and idolatry in the same vehement denunciations. The conclusion was obvious. What had been supernaturally revealed to the chosen people could not have been discovered elsewhere by a simple exercise of human reason. Plato must have borrowed his wisdom from Moses.¹ At a later period, the celebrated Philo,² following up the clue thus furnished, proceeded to evolve the whole of Greek philosophy from the Pentateuch. An elaborate system of allegorical interpretation, borrowed from the Stoics, was the instrument with which he effected his enterprise. The result was what might have been foreseen—a complete Hellenisation of Hebrew religion. Circumscription, antithesis, and mediation were, as we know, the chief moments of Greek thought. Philo rearranged his monotheistic system according to the scheme which they supplied. He first determined the divine unity with such logical precision as to place God out of relation to the world. Then, in the true Greek spirit, he placed at the other end of his metaphysical scale matter—the shifting, formless, shadowy residuum left behind when every ideal element has been thought away from the world. So conceived, matter became, what it had been to Plato, the principle of all evil, and therefore something with which God could not possibly be brought into contact. Accordingly, the process of creation is made intelligible by the interposition of a connecting link in the shape of certain hypostasised divine attributes or forces, represented as both belonging to and distinct from the divine personality. Of these the most important are the goodness to which the world owes its origin, and the power by which it is governed. Both are united in the Logos or Word. This last idea—which, by the way, was derived not from Plato but from the Stoics—sums up in itself the totality of mediatorial functions by which God and the world are put into communication with one another. In like manner, Plato had interposed a universal soul between his Ideas and the world of sensible appearances, and had pointed to an arrangement of the Ideas themselves by which we could ascend

¹ Zeller, iii., 2, pp. 257 *sqq.*

² All we know of Philo is that he went with a deputation sent by the Jews of Alexandria to the emperor Caius Caesar (Caligula) A.D. 40, being at that time an old man.

in thought to a contemplation of the absolute Good. There seems, however, to be a difference between the original Hellenic conception and the same conception as adapted to Oriental ways of thinking. With Plato, as with every other Greek philosopher, a mediator is introduced neither for the purpose of representing the supreme ideal to us nor of transmitting our aspirations to it, but of guiding and facilitating our approach to it, of helping us to a perfect apprehension and realisation of its meaning. With Philo, on the contrary, the relation of the Logos to God is much the same as that of a Grand Vizier to an Oriental Sultan. And, from this point of view, it is very significant that he should compare it to the high-priest who lays the prayers of the people before the eternal throne, especially when we couple this with his declaration that the Logos is the God of us imperfect beings, the first God being reserved for the contemplation of those who are wise and perfect.¹

Such a system was likely to result, and before long actually did result, in the realisation of the Logos on earth, in the creation of an inspired and infallible Church, mediating between God and man ; while it gave increased authority and expansive power to another dogma which already existed in Philo's time, and of which his Logos was perhaps only the metaphysical sublimation,—the superstition that the divine Word has been given to mankind under the form of an infallible book. From another point of view, we may discern a certain connexion between the idea that God would be defiled by any immediate contact with the material world, and the Sabbatarianism which was so rife among Gentiles as well as among Jews at that period. For such a theory of the divine character readily associates itself with the notion that holiness excludes not only material industry but any interest the scope of which is limited to our mundane existence.

That Philo's interpretation of Platonism ultimately reacted on Greek thought seems certain, but at what date his influence began to tell, and how far it reached, must remain undecided. Plutarch speaks of God's purity and of his transcendent elevation above the universe in language closely resembling that of the Alexandrian Jew, with whose opinions he may have been indirectly acquainted.² We have already seen how the daemons were employed to fill up the interval thus created, and what serious concessions to popular superstition the belief in their activity involved. Still Plutarch does not go so far as to say that the world was not created by God. This step was taken by Numenius, a philosopher who flourished about the middle of the second century, and who represents the complete

¹ For references, see Ritter and Preller, *Hist. Phil.*, Sectt. 483-498 (7th ed.).

² For references, see Zeller, *iii.*, 2, pp. 166 *sqq.*

identification of Platonism with Pythagoreanism, already mentioned as characteristic of the period following that date. Numenius is acquainted with Philo's speculations, and accepts his derivation of Platonism from the Pentateuch. 'What,' he asks, 'is Plato but a Moses writing in the Attic dialect?'¹ He also accepts the theory that the world was created by a single intermediate agent, whom, however, he credits with a much more distinct and independent personality than Philo could see his way to admitting. And he regards the human soul as a fallen spirit whose life on earth is the consequence of its own sinful desires. From such fancies there was but a single step to the more thorough-going dualism which looks on the material world as entirely evil, and as the creation of a blind or malevolent power. This step had already been taken by Gnosticism. The system so called summed up in itself, more completely, perhaps, than any other, all the convergent or conflicting ideas of the age. Greek mythology and Greek philosophy, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity each contributed an element to the fantastic and complicated scheme propounded by its last great representative, Valentinus. This teacher pitches his conception of the supreme God even higher than Philo, and places him, like Plato's absolute Good, outside the sphere of being. From him—or it—as from a bottomless gulf proceeds a vast series of emanations ending in the Demiurgus or creator of the visible world, whose action is described, in language vividly recalling the speculations of certain modern metaphysicians, as an enormous blunder. For, according to Gnosticism, the world is not merely infected with evil by participation in a material principle, it is evil altogether, and a special intervention of the higher powers is needed in order to undo the work of its delirious author.² Here we have a particular side of Plato's philosophy exaggerated and distorted by contact with Zoroastrian dualism. In the *Politicus* there is a mythical description of two alternate cycles, in one of which the world is governed by a wise providence, while in the other things are abandoned to themselves, and move in a direction the reverse of that originally imposed on them. It is in the latter cycle that Plato supposes us to be moving at present.³ Again, after having been long content to explain the origin of evil by the resistance of inert matter to the informing power of ideal goodness, Plato goes a step further in his latest work, the *Laws*, and hazards the hypothesis of an evil soul

¹ Suidas, quoted by Ritter and Preller, sect. 504.

² Vacherot, *Histoire de l'Ecole d'Alexandrie*, pp. 214-17; Zeller, iii., 2, pp. 439 *sqq.* The original authorities are Irenaeus and Hippolytus. The most recent English account is that given by Dr. E. F. Scott in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6 (1913).

³ *Politicus*, pp. 270 *sqq.*

actively counterworking the beneficent designs of God.¹ And we find the same idea subsequently taken up by Plutarch, who sees in it the most efficient means for exonerating God from all share in the responsibility for physical disorder and moral wrong.² But both master and disciple restricted the influence of their supposed evil soul within very narrow limits, and they would have repudiated with horror such a notion as that the whole visible world is a product of folly or of sin.

Gnostic pessimism marks the extreme point of aberration to which Greek thought was drawn by the attraction of Oriental superstition. How it was rescued from destruction by a new systematisation of its ancient methods and results will be explained in another chapter.

¹ *Legg.*, x., pp. 896, D *sqq.*, 898, C, 904, A.

² *De Isid. et Osir.*, xlv. *sq.*; *De Vir. Moral.*, iii.; *De Anim. Procr.*, v., 5. Plutarch supposes that the irrational soul in man is derived from the evil world-soul which he regards rather as senseless than as Satanic. It would thus very closely resemble the delirious Demiurgus of Valentinus and the 'absolut Dumme' of Eduard v. Hartmann.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPIRITUALISM OF PLOTINUS

I

AMONG the most interesting of Plutarch's religious writings is one entitled *On the Delays in the Divine Vengeance*. As might be expected from the name, it deals with a problem closely akin to that which ages before had been made the subject of such sublime imagery and such inconclusive reasoning by the author of the Book of Job. What troubled the Hebrew poet was the apparently undeserved suffering of the just. What the Greek moralist feels himself called on to explain is the apparent prosperity and impunity of the wicked. He will not for a moment admit that crime remains unavenged; his object is to show why the retribution does not follow directly on the deed. And, in order to account for this, he adduces a number of very ingenious reasons. By acting deliberately rather than in blind anger, the gods wish to read us a useful lesson in patience and forbearance. Sometimes their object is to give the sinner an opportunity for repentance and amendment; or else they may be holding him in reserve for the performance of some beneficial work. At other times, their justice is delayed only that it may be manifested by some signal and striking form of retribution. In many cases, the final stroke has been preceded by long years of secret torment; and even where no suffering seems to be inflicted, the pangs of remorse may furnish a sufficient expiation. Or again, vengeance may be reserved for a future generation. Some persons hold that to visit the sins of the fathers on the children is unjust, but in this they are profoundly mistaken. Members of the same family and citizens of the same state are connected as parts of one organic whole; sharing in the benefits which accrue from the good deeds of their predecessors, it is right that they should also share in the responsibility for their crimes. Moreover, the posterity of the wicked inherit a sinful disposition which, as the gods can clearly foresee, would betray itself in overt acts were they not cut off in their youth. And it is equally an error to suppose that the original wrong-doers

remain unaffected by the retribution which befalls their descendants. On the contrary, they witness it from the next world, where it adds poignancy to their remorse, and entails on them fresh penalties over and above those which they have already been doomed to suffer.

Thus with Plutarch, as with his master Plato, a future world is the grand court of appeal from the anomalies and inequalities of this world ; and, following the example of the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, he reserves to the last a terrible picture of the torments held in store for those who have not expiated their transgressions on earth, describing them as they are supposed to have been witnessed by a human soul temporarily separated from the body for the purpose of viewing and reporting on this final manifestation of divine justice. It would appear, however, from the narrative in question that future punishments are not eternal. After a more or less protracted period of expiation, the immortal soul is restored to the upper world, under whatever embodiment seems most appropriate to its former career. Among those whose turn has arrived for entering on a new existence at the moment when Plutarch's visitor makes his descent into hell, is the soul of Nero. The wicked Emperor has just been condemned to assume the form of a viper, when a great light shines forth, and from the midst of the light a voice is heard crying : ' Let him reappear under the guise of a song-bird haunting the neighbourhood of marshes and meres ; for he has already paid the penalty of his guilt, and the gods owe him some kindness for having liberated Greece, the best and most beloved by them of all the nations that he ruled.'

It would seem from this singular and touching expression of gratitude that the deathless idealism of Hellas found in Nero's gift of a nominal liberty ample compensation for the very real and precious works of art of which she was despoiled on the occasion of his visit to her shores. At first sight, that visit looks like nothing better than a display of triumphant buffoonery on the one side and of servile adulation on the other. But, in reality, it was a turning-point in the history of civilisation, the awakening to new glories of a race in whom life had become, to all outward appearance, extinct. For more than a whole century the seat of intellectual supremacy had been established in Rome ; and during the same period Rome herself had turned to the West rather than to the East for renovation and support. Caesar's conquests were like the revelation of a new world ; and three times over, when the two halves of the divided empire came into collision, the champion who commanded the resources of that world had won. Henceforth it was to her western provinces and to her western frontiers that Rome looked for danger, for aggrandisement, or for renown. In Horace's time,

men asked each other what the warlike Cantabrians were planning; and the personal presence of Augustus himself was needed before those unruly Iberians could be subdued. His adopted sons earned their first laurels at the expense of Alpine mountaineers. His later years are filled with German campaigns; and the great disaster of Varus must have riveted attention more closely than any victory to what was passing between the Rhine and the Elbe. Under Claudius, the conquest of Britain opened a new source of interest in the West, and, like Germany before, supplied a new title of triumph to the imperial family. Half the literary talent in Rome, the two Senecas, Lucan, and at a later period Martial and Quintilian, came from Spain, as also did Trajan, whose youth falls in this period.

With Nero's visit to Greece in 66 the reaction begins. When, a few years later, the empire was disputed between a general from Gaul and a general from Syria, it was the candidate of the eastern legions who prevailed; the revolt of Judaea drew attention to eastern affairs; and the great campaigns of Trajan must have definitely turned the tide of public interest in that direction, notwithstanding the far-sighted warning of Tacitus. On more peaceful ground, Hadrian's Asiatic tours and his protracted residence at Athens completed the work inaugurated by Nero. In his reign, the intellectual centre of gravity is definitely transferred to Greece; and Roman literature, after its last blaze of splendour under Trajan, becomes extinct, or survives only in forms borrowed from the sophistical rhetoric of the East.

Plutarch, who was twenty-one when Nero declared his country free, was the first leader in the great Hellenist revival, without, at the same time, entirely belonging to it. He cared more for the matter than for the form of antiquity, for the great deeds and greater thoughts of the past than for the words in which they were related and explained. Hence, by the awkwardness and heaviness of his style, he is more akin to the writers of the Alexandrian period than to his immediate successors. On the one side, he opens the era of classical idealism; on the other, he closes that of encyclopaedic erudition. The next generation bore much the same relation to Plutarch that the first Sophists bore to Hecataeus and Herodotus. Addressing themselves to popular audiences, they were obliged to study perspicuity and elegance of expression, at the risk, it is true, of verbosity and platitude. Such men were Dion Chrysostom, Herôdes Atticus, Maximus Tyrius, and Aristeides. But the old models were imitated with more success by writers who lived more entirely in the past. Arrian reproduced the graceful simplicity of Xenophon in his narrative of the campaigns of Alexander and his reports of the lectures of Epictêtus.

Lucian composed dialogues ranking with the greatest masterpieces of lighter Attic literature. The felicity of his style and his complete emancipation from superstition may probably be traced to the same source—a diligent study of the ancient classics. It is certain that neither as a writer nor as a critic does he represent the average educated taste of his own times. So far from giving polytheism its deathblow, as he was formerly imagined to have done, he only protested unavailingly against its restoration.

Not only oratory and literature, but philosophy and science were cultivated with renewed vigour. The line between philosophy and sophisticism was not, indeed, very distinctly drawn. Epictëtus severely censures the moral teachers of his time for ornamenting their lectures with claptrap rhetoric about the battle of Thermopylae or flowery descriptions of Pan and the Nymphs.¹ And the professed declaimers similarly drew on a store of philosophical commonplaces. This sort of popular treatment led to the cultivation of ethics and theology in preference to logic and metaphysics, and to an eclectic blending of the chief systems with one another. A severer method was inculcated in the schools of Athens, especially after the endowment of their professors by Marcus Aurelius; but, in practice, this came to mean what it means in modern universities, the substitution of philology for independent enquiry. The question was not so much what is true as what did Plato or Aristotle really think. Alexandrian science showed something of the same learned and traditional character in the works of Ptolemy; but the great name of Galen marks a real progress in physiology, as well as a return to the principles of Hippocrates.

Thus, so far as was possible in such altered circumstances, did the Renaissance of the second century reproduce the intellectual environment from which Plato's philosophy had sprung. In literature, there was the same attention to words rather than to things; sometimes taking the form of exact scholarship, after the manner of Prodicus; sometimes of loose and superficial declamation, after the manner of Gorgias. There was the naturalism of Hippias, elaborated into a system by the Stoics, and practised as a life by the new Cynics. There was the hedonism of Aristippus, inculcated under a diluted form by the Epicureans. There was the old Ionian materialism, professed by Stoics and Epicureans alike. There was the scepticism of Protagoras, revived by Aenesidêmus and his followers. There was the mathematical mysticism of the Pythagoreans, flourishing in Egypt instead of in southern Italy. There was the purer geometry of the Alexandrian Museum,

¹ *Diss.*, iii., 23, 11 and 38.

corresponding to the school of Cyrênê. On all sides, there was a mass of vague moral preaching, without any attempt to exhibit the moral truths which we empirically know as part of a comprehensive metaphysical philosophy. And, lastly, there was an immense undefined religious movement, ranging from theologies which taught the spirituality of God and of the human soul, down to the most irrational and abject superstition. We saw in the last chapter how, corresponding to this environment, there was a revived Platonism, that Platonism was in fact the fashionable philosophy of that age, just as it afterwards became the fashionable philosophy of another Renaissance thirteen centuries later. But it was a Platonism with the backbone of the system taken out. Plato's thoughts all centred in a carefully considered scheme for the moral and political regeneration of society. Now, with the destruction of Greek independence, and the absorption everywhere of free city-states into a vast military empire, it might seem as if the realisation of such a scheme had become altogether impracticable. The Republic was, indeed, at that moment realising itself under a form adapted to the altered exigencies of the time; but no Platonist could as yet recognise in the Christian Church even an approximate fulfilment of his master's dream. Failing any practical issue, there remained the speculative side of Plato's teaching. His writings did not embody a complete system, but they offered the materials whence a system could be framed. Here the choice lay between two possible lines of construction; and each had, in fact, been already attempted by his own immediate disciples. One was the Pythagorean method of the Old Academy, what Aristotle contemptuously called the conversion of philosophy into mathematics. We saw in the last chapter how the revived Platonism of the first and second centuries entered once more on the same perilous path, a path which led farther and farther away from the true principles of Greek thought, and of Plato himself when his intellect stood at its highest point of splendour. Neo-Pythagorean mysticism meant an unreconciled dualism of spirit and matter; and as the ultimate consequence of that dualism, it meant the substitution of magical incantations and ceremonial observances for the study of reason and virtue. Moreover, it readily allied itself with Oriental beliefs, which meant a negation of natural law that the Greeks could hardly tolerate, and, under the form of Gnostic pessimism, a belief in the inherent depravity of nature that they could not tolerate at all.

The other alternative was to combine the dialectical idealism of Plato with the cosmology of early Greek thought, interpreting the two worlds of spirit and nature as gradations of a single series and manifestations of a single principle.

This was what Aristotle had attempted to do, but had not done so thoroughly as to satisfy the moral wants of his own age, or the religious wants of the age when a revived Platonism was seeking to organise itself into a system which should be the reconciliation of reason and faith. Yet the better sort of Platonists felt that this work could not be accomplished without the assistance of Aristotle, whose essential agreement with their master, as against Stoicism, they fully recognised. Their mistake was to assume that this agreement extended to every point of his teaching. Taken in this sense, their attempted harmonies were speedily demolished by scholars whose professional familiarity with the original sources showed them how strongly Aristotle himself had insisted on the differences which separated him from the Academy and its founder.¹ To identify the two great spiritualist philosophers being impossible, it remained to show how they could be combined. The solution of such a problem demanded more genius than was likely to be developed in the school of Athens. An intenser intellectual life prevailed in Alexandria, where the materials of erudition were more abundantly supplied, and where contact with the Oriental religions gave Hellenism a fuller consciousness of its distinction from and superiority to every other form of speculative activity. And here, accordingly, the fundamental idea of Neo-Platonism was conceived.

II

Plotinus is not only the greatest and most celebrated of the Neo-Platonists, he is also the first respecting whose opinions we have any authentic information, and therefore the one who for all practical purposes must be regarded as the founder of the school. What we know about his life is derived from a biography written by his disciple Porphyry. This is a rather foolish performance ; but it possesses considerable interest, both on account of the information which it was intended to supply, and also as affording indirect evidence of the height to which superstition had risen during the third century of our era. Plotinus gave his friends to understand that he was born in Egypt about 205 A.D. ; but so reluctant was he to mention any circumstance connected with his physical existence, that his race and parentage always remained a mystery. He showed somewhat more communicativeness in speaking of his mental history, and used to relate in after-life that at the age of twenty-eight he had felt strongly attracted to the study of philosophy, but remained utterly dissatisfied with what the most famous teachers of Alexandria had to tell him on the subject. At last

¹ Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, pp. 807 *sqq.*

he found in Ammonius Saccas the ideal sage for whom he had been seeking, and "continued to attend his lectures for eleven years. At the end of that period, he joined an eastern expedition under the Emperor Gordian, for the purpose of making himself acquainted with the wisdom of the Persians and Indians, concerning which his curiosity seems to have been excited by Ammonius. But his hopes of further enlightenment in that quarter were not fulfilled. The campaign terminated disastrously; the emperor himself fell at the head of his troops in Mesopotamia, and Plotinus had great difficulty in escaping with his life to Antioch. Soon afterwards he settled in Rome, and remained there until near the end of his life, when ill-health obliged him to retire to a country seat in Campania, the property of a deceased friend, Zêthus. Here the philosopher died, in the sixty-sixth year of his age.

Plotinus seems to have begun his career as a public teacher soon after taking up his residence in Rome. His lectures at first assumed the form of conversations with his private friends. Apparently by way of reviving the traditions of Socrates and Plato, he encouraged them to take an active part in the discussion: but either he did not possess the authority of his great exemplars, or the rules of Greek dialogue were not very strictly observed in Rome; for we learn from the report of an eye-witness that interruptions were far too frequent, and that a vast amount of nonsense was talked.¹ Afterwards a more regular system of lecturing was established, and papers were read aloud by those who had any observations to offer, as in our own philosophical societies.

The new teacher gathered round him a distinguished society, comprising not only professional philosophers, but also physicians, rhetors, senators, and statesmen. Among the last-mentioned class, Rogatianus, who filled the office of praetor, showed the sincerity of his conversion by renouncing the dignities of his position, surrendering his worldly possessions, limiting himself to the barest necessities of life, and allowing himself to be dependent even for these on the hospitality of his friends. Thanks to this asceticism, he recovered the use of his hands and feet, which had before been completely crippled with gout.²

The fascination exercised by Plotinus was not only intellectual but personal. Singularly affable, obliging, and patient, he was always ready to answer the questions of his friends, even laying aside his work in order to discuss the difficulties which they brought to him for solution. His lectures were given in Greek; and although this always remained to him a foreign language, the pronunciation and grammar of which he

¹ Porph., *Vita Plot.*, cap. iii.

² *Ibid.*, cap. vii.

never completely mastered, his expressions frequently won admiration by their felicity and force; and the effect of his eloquence was still further heightened by the glowing enthusiasm which irradiated his whole countenance, naturally a very pleasing one, during the delivery of the more impressive passages.¹

As might be expected, the circle of admirers which surrounded Plotinus included several women, beginning with his hostess Gemina and her daughter. He also stood high in the favour of the Emperor Gallienus and his consort Salonina; so much so, indeed, that they were nearly persuaded to let him try the experiment of restoring a ruined city in Campania, and governing it according to Plato's laws.² Porphyry attributes the failure of this project to the envy of the courtiers; Hegel, with probably quite as much reason, to the sound judgment of the imperial ministers.³

Our philosopher had, however, abundant opportunity for showing on a more modest scale that he was not destitute of practical ability. So high did his character stand, that many persons of distinction, when they felt their end approaching, brought their children to him to be taken care of, and entrusted their property to his keeping. As a result of the confidence thus reposed in him, his house was always filled with young people of both sexes, to whose education and material interests he paid the most scrupulous attention, observing that as long as his wards did not make a profession of philosophy, their estates and incomes ought to be preserved unimpaired. It is also mentioned that, although frequently chosen to arbitrate in disputes, he never made a single enemy among the Roman citizens—a piece of good fortune which is more than one could safely promise to any one similarly circumstanced in an Italian city at the present day.⁴

Plotinus possessed a remarkable power of reading the characters and even the thoughts of those about him. It is said, probably with some exaggeration, that he predicted the future fate of all the boys placed under his care. Thus he foretold that a certain Polemo, in whom he took particular interest, would devote himself to love and die young; which proved only too true, and may well have been anticipated by a good observer without the exercise of any supernatural prescience. As another instance of his penetration, we are

¹ *Ibid.*, cap. xiii.

² Not, as is commonly stated, on the model of Plato's Republic, which would have been a far more difficult enterprise, and one little in accordance with the practical good sense shown on other occasions by Plotinus.

³ Porph., *Vita*, cap. xii.; Hegel, *Gesch. d. Ph.*, iii., p. 34.

⁴ Porph., *Vita*, cap. ix.

told that a valuable necklace having been stolen from a widow named Chione, who lived in his house with her family, the slaves were all led into the presence of Plotinus that he might single out the thief. After a careful scrutiny, the philosopher put his finger on the guilty individual. The man at first protested his innocence, but was soon induced by an application of the whip to confess, and, what was a much more valuable verification of his accuser's insight, to restore the missing article. Porphyry himself could testify from personal experience to his friend's remarkable power of penetration. Being once about to commit suicide, Plotinus divined his intention, and told him that it proceeded, not from a rational resolution, but from a fit of the blues, as a remedy for which he prescribed change of scene, which in fact had the desired effect.¹

Previous to his forty-ninth year, Plotinus wrote nothing. At that age he began to compose short essays on subjects that suggested themselves in the course of his oral teaching. During the next ten years, he produced twenty-one such papers, some of them only a page or two in length. At the end of that period, he made the acquaintance of his future editor and biographer, Porphyry, a young student of Semitic extraction, whose original name was Malchus. The two soon became fast friends; and whatever speculative differences at

¹ *Ibid.*, xi. Leopardi has taken the incident referred to as the subject of one of his dialogues; Plotinus, the great champion of optimism, being chosen, with bitter irony, to represent the Italian poet's own pessimistic views of life. The difficulty was to show how the Neo-Platonist philosopher could, consistently with the principles thus fathered on him, still continue to dissuade his pupil from committing suicide. Leopardi voluntarily faces the *argumentum ad hominem* by which common sense has in all ages summarily disposed of pessimism: 'Then why don't you kill yourself?' ('Your philosophy or your life,' so to speak.) The answer is singularly lame. Porphyry is to think of the distress which his death would cause to his friends. He might have replied that if the general misery were so great as Plotinus had maintained, a little more or less affliction would not make any appreciable difference; that, considering the profound selfishness of mankind, an accepted article of faith with pessimism, his friends would in all probability easily resign themselves to his loss; that, at any rate, the suffering inflicted on them would be a mere trifle compared to what he would himself be getting rid of; and that, if the worst came to the worst, they had but to follow his example and ease themselves of all their troubles at a single stroke. A sincere pessimist would probably say: 'I do not kill myself because I am afraid: and my very fear of death is a conclusive argument in favour of my creed. Nothing proves the deep-rooted necessity of pain more strongly than that we should refuse to profit by so obvious a means of escaping from it as that offered by suicide.' Of course where pessimism is associated with a belief in metempsychosis, as among the Buddhists, there is the best of reasons for not seeking a violent death, namely, that it would in all probability transfer the suicide to another and inferior grade of existence; whereas, by using the opportunities of self-mortification which this world offers, he might succeed in extinguishing the vital principle for good and all. And Schopenhauer does, in fact, adopt the belief in metempsychosis just so far as is necessary to exclude the desirability of suicide from his philosophy. But the truth is, that while Asiatic pessimism is the logical consequence of a false metaphysical system, the analogous systems of European pessimists are simply an excuse for not pushing their disgust with life to its only rational issue.

first divided them were quickly removed by an amicable controversy between Porphyry and another disciple named Amelius, which resulted in the unreserved adhesion of the former to the doctrine of their common master.¹ The literary activity of Plotinus seems to have been powerfully stimulated by association with the more methodical mind of Porphyry. During the five years² of their personal intercourse he produced nineteen essays, amounting altogether to three times the bulk of the former series. Eight shorter pieces followed during the period of failing health which preceded his death, Porphyry being at that time absent in Sicily, whither he had retired when suffering from the fit of depression already mentioned.

Porphyry observes that the first series of essays show the immaturity of youth—a period which he extends to what is >generally considered the sufficiently ripe age of fifty-nine;—the second series the full-grown power of manhood; and the last the weakness of declining years. The truth is that his method of criticism, at least in this instance, was to judge of compositions as if their merit depended on their length, and perhaps also with reference to the circumstance whether their subject had or had not been previously talked over with himself. In point of fact, the earlier pieces include some of the very best things that Plotinus ever wrote; and, taking them in the order of their composition, they form a connected exposition of Neo-Platonic principles, to which nothing of importance was ever added. This I shall attempt to show in the most effectual manner possible by basing my own account of Neo-Platonism on an analysis of their contents; and I strongly recommend them to the attention of all Greek scholars who wish to make themselves acquainted with Plotinus at first hand, but have not leisure to wade through the whole of his works. It may also be mentioned that the last series of essays are distinguished by the popular character of their subjects rather than by any evidence of failing powers, one of them, that on Providence,³ being remarkable for the vigour and eloquence of its style.

By cutting up some of the longer essays into parts, Porphyry succeeded, much to his delight, in bringing the whole number up to fifty-four, which is a product of the two perfect numbers six and nine. He then divided them into six volumes,

¹ Porph., *Vita.*, cap. xviii.

² Porphyry says six, but there must be a mistake somewhere, as Plotinus was fifty-nine when their friendship began, and died in his sixty-sixth year; while Porphyry's departure for Sicily took place two years before that event, leaving, at most, five years during which their personal intercourse can have lasted, if the other dates are to be trusted.

³ *Enn.*, iii., 2 and 3.

each containing nine books—the famous *Enneads* of Plotinus. His principle of arrangement was to bring together the books in which similar subjects were discussed, placing the easier disquisitions first. This disposition has been adhered to by subsequent editors, with the single exception of Kirchhoff, who has printed the works of Plotinus according to the order in which they were written.¹ Porphyry's scrupulous information has saved modern scholars an incalculable amount of trouble, but has not, apparently, earned all the gratitude it deserved, to judge by Zeller's intimation that the chronological order of the separate pieces cannot even now be precisely determined.² Unfortunately, what would have been of priceless value in the case of Plato and Aristotle, is of comparatively small value in the case of Plotinus. His system must have been fully formed when he began to write, and the dates in our possession give no clue to the manner in which its leading principles were evolved.³

Such, so far as they can be ascertained, are the most important facts in the life of Plotinus. Interwoven with these, we find some legendary details which vividly illustrate the superstition and credulity of the age. It is evident from his childish talk about the numbers six and nine that Porphyry was imbued with Pythagorean ideas. Accordingly, his whole account of Plotinus is dominated by the wish to represent that philosopher under the guise of a Pythagorean saint. The manner in which he exalts his hero's remarkable sagacity into a power of supernatural prescience and divination has been already mentioned. He also tells us, with the most unsuspecting good faith, how a certain Alexandrian philosopher whose jealousy had been excited by the success of his illustrious countryman, endeavoured to draw down the malignant influences of the stars on the head of Plotinus, but was obliged to desist on finding that the attack recoiled on himself.⁴ On another occasion, an Egyptian priest, by way of exhibiting his skill in magic, offered to conjure up the daemon or guardian spirit of Plotinus. The latter readily consented, and the Temple of Isis was chosen for the scene of the operations, as, according to the Egyptian, no other spot sufficiently pure for the purpose could be found in Rome. The incantations were duly pronounced, when, much to the admiration of those present, a god

¹ *Plotini Opera* recognovit Adolphus Kirchhoff, Lipsiae, 1856, in Teubner's series of Greek and Latin authors. H. F. Müller, a later editor of Plotinus, has returned to the original arrangement by *Enneads*. His edition is accompanied by a very useful German translation, only half of which, however, has as yet appeared. (Berlin, 1878.) There is a complete French translation with commentary by Bouillet. (Paris, 1857-1860.)

² Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, p. 472. (Third edition.)

³ Porph., *Vita*, iv. *sqq.*, xxiv. *sqq.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, cap. x.

made his appearance instead of the expected daemon. By what particular marks the divinity of the apparition was determined, Porphyry omits to mention. The philosopher was congratulated by his countryman on the possession of such a distinguished patron, but the celestial visitor vanished before any questions could be put to him. This mishap was attributed to a friend 'who, either from envy or fear, choked the birds which had been given him to hold,' and which seem to have played a very important part in the incantation, though what it was, we do not find more particularly specified.¹

Another distinguished compliment was paid to Plotinus after his death by no less an authority than the Pythian Apollo, who at this period had fully recovered the use of his voice. On being consulted respecting the fate of the philosopher's soul, the god replied by a flood of bombastic twaddle, in which the glorified spirit of Plotinus is described as released from the chain of human necessity and the surging uproar of the body, swimming stoutly to the storm-beaten shore, and mounting the heaven-illuminated path, not unknown to him even in life, that leads to the blissful abodes of the immortals.²

In view of such tendencies, one hardly knows how much confidence is to be placed in Porphyry's well-known picture of his master as one who lived so entirely for spiritual interests that he seemed ashamed of having a body at all. We are told that, as a consequence of this feeling, he avoided the subject of his past life, refused to let his portrait be painted, neglected the care of his health, and rigorously abstained from animal food, even when it was prescribed for him under the form of medicine.³ All this may be true, but it is not very consistent with the special doctrines of Plotinus as recorded in his writings, nor should it be allowed to influence our interpretation of them. In his personal character and conduct he may have allowed himself to be carried away by the prevalent asceticism and superstition of the age; in his philosophy he is guided by the healthier traditions of Plato and Aristotle, and stands in declared opposition to the mysticism which was a negation of nature and of life.

How far Plotinus was indebted to Ammonius Saccas for his speculative ideas is another question with respect to which the Pythagoreanising tendencies of his biographer may possibly have contributed to the diffusion of a serious misconception. What Porphyry tells us is this. Before leaving Alexandria, Plotinus had bound himself by a mutual agreement with two of his fellow-pupils, Herennius and Origenes (not the Christian Father, but a pagan philosopher of the same

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, cap. xxii.

³ *Ibid.*, capp. i. and ii.

age and name), to keep secret what they had learned by listening to the lectures of Ammonius. Herennius, however, soon broke the compact, and Origenes followed his example. Plotinus then considered that the engagement was at an end, and used the results of his studies under Ammonius as the basis of his conversational lectures in Rome, the substance of which, we are left to suppose, was subsequently embodied in his published writings. But, as Zeller has pointed out, this whole story bears a suspicious resemblance to what is related of the early Pythagorean school. There also the doctrines of the master were regarded by his disciples as a mystery which they pledged themselves to keep secret, and were only divulged through the infidelity of one among their number, Philolaus. And the same critic proves by a careful examination of what are known to have been the opinions of Origenes and Longinus, both fellow-pupils of Plotinus, that they differed from him on some points of essential importance to his system. We cannot, therefore, suppose that these points were included in the teaching of their common master, Ammonius.¹ But if this be so, it follows that Plotinus was the real founder of the Neo-Platonic school; and, in all cases, his writings remain the great source whence our knowledge of its first principles is derived.

III

In point of style, Plotinus is much the most difficult of the ancient philosophers, and, in this respect, is only surpassed by a very few of the moderns. Even Longinus, who was one of the most intelligent critics then living, and who, besides, had been educated in the same school with our philosopher, could not make head or tail of his books when copies of them were sent to him by Porphyry, and supposed, after the manner of philologists, that the text must be corrupt, much to the disgust of Porphyry, who assures us that its accuracy was unimpeachable.² Probably politeness prevented Longinus from saying, what he must have seen at a glance, that Plotinus was a total stranger to the art of literary composition. We are told that he wrote as fast as if he were copying from a book; but he had never mastered even the elements of the Greek language; and the weakness of his eyesight prevented him from reading over what he had written. The mistakes in spelling and grammar Porphyry corrected, but it is evident that he has made no alterations in the general style of the *Enneads*; and this is nearly as bad as bad can be—disjointed, elliptical, redundant, and awkward. Chapter follows chapter

¹ Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 451 *sqq.*

² Porph., *Vita*, cap. xx.

and paragraph succeeds to paragraph without any fixed principle of arrangement; the connexion of the sentences is by no means clear; some sentences are almost unintelligible from their extreme brevity, others from their inordinate length and complexity. The unpractised hand of a foreigner constantly reveals itself in the choice and collocation of words and grammatical inflections. Predicates and subjects are huddled together without any regard to the harmonies of number and gender, so that even if false concords do not occur, we are continually annoyed by the suggestion of their presence.¹

But even the most perfect mastery of Greek would not have made Plotinus a successful writer. We are told that before taking up the pen he had thoroughly thought out his whole subject; but this is not the impression produced by a perusal of the *Enneads*. On the contrary, he seems to be thinking as he goes along, and to be continually beset by difficulties that he has not foreseen. The frequent and disorderly interruptions by which his lectures were at one time disturbed seem to have made their way into his solitary meditations, breaking or tangling the thread of systematic exposition at every turn. Irrelevant questions are constantly intruding themselves, to be met by equally irrelevant answers. The first mode of expressing an idea is often withdrawn, and another put in its place, which is, in most cases, the less intelligible of the two; while, as a general rule, when we want to know what a thing is, Plotinus informs us with indefatigable prolixity what it is not.

Nevertheless, by dint of pertinacious repetition, the founder of Neo-Platonism has succeeded in making the main outlines, and to a great extent the details, of his system so perfectly clear that probably no philosophy is now better understood than his. In this respect, Plotinus offers a remarkable contrast to the two great thinkers from whom his ideas are principally derived. While Plato and Aristotle construct each particular sentence with masterly clearness, the general drift of their speculations is by no means easy to ascertain; and, even now, critics take diametrically opposite views of the interpretation which is to be put on their teaching with regard to several most important points. The expositors of Neo-Platonism, on the contrary, show a rare unanimity in their accounts of its constitutive principles.

¹ A single example will make my meaning clear. Plotinus is trying to prove that there can be no Form without Matter. He first argues that if the notes of a concept can be separated from one another, this proves the presence of Matter, since divisibility is an affection belonging only to it. He then goes on to say *εἰ δὲ πολλὰ ὃν ἀμέριστόν ἐστι, τὰ πολλὰ ἐν ἐνὶ ὄντι ἐν ἑλῇ ἐστὶ τῷ ἐνὶ αὐτὰ μορφᾷ αὐτοῦ ὄντα.* (*Enn.*, ii., 4, 4; Kirchhoff, i., p. 113, l. 7.) The meaning is, that if the notes are inseparable, the unity in which they inhere is related to them as Matter to Form.

What they differ about is its origin and its historical significance. And these are points on which we too shall have to enter, since all the ancient systems are interesting to us chiefly as historical phenomena, and Neo-Platonism more so than any other. Plotinus effected a vast revolution in speculative opinion, but he effected it by seizing on the thoughts of others rather than by any new thoughts or even new developments or applications of his own.

Whether Plotinus was or was not a disciple of Ammonius, beyond all doubt he considered himself a disciple of Plato. There are more than a hundred references to that philosopher in the *Enneads*, against less than thirty references to all the other ancient thinkers put together;¹ and, what is more remarkable, in only about half of them is he mentioned by name. The reader is expected to know that 'he' always means Plato. And it is an article of faith with Plotinus that his master cannot be mistaken; when the words of oracular wisdom seem to contradict one another, there must be some way of harmonising them. When they contradict what he teaches himself, the difficulty must be removed by skilful interpretation; or, better still, it must be discreetly ignored.² On the other hand, when a principle is palpably borrowed from Aristotle, not only is its derivation unacknowledged, but we are given to understand by implication that it belongs to the system which Aristotle was at most pains to controvert.³

But numerous as are the obligations, whether real or imaginary, of the Alexandrian to the Athenian teacher, they range over a comparatively limited field. What most interests a modern student in Platonism—its critical preparation, its conversational dialectic, its personal episodes, its moral enthusiasm, its political superstructure—had apparently no interest for Plotinus as a writer. He goes straight to the metaphysical core of the system, and occupies himself with re-thinking it in its minutest details. Now this was just the part which had either not been discussed at all, or had been very insufficiently discussed by his predecessors. It would seem that the revival of Platonic studies had followed an order somewhat similar to the order in which Plato's own ideas were evolved. The scepticism of the *Apologia* had been taken up and worked out to its last consequences by the New Academy. The theory of intuitive knowledge, the ethical antithesis between reason and passion, and the doctrine of immortality under its more popular form, had been resumed by the Greek and Roman Eclectics. Plutarch busied himself

¹ See the index to Kirchhoff's edition.

² For references see Kirchner, *Die Philosophie des Plotin*, p. 185; Steinhart, *Meletemata Plotiniana*, pp. 9-23; Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, pp. 430 sq.

³ Steinhart, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 sqq.; Kirchner, *op. cit.*, pp. 186 sqq.

with the erotic philosophy of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, as also did his successor, Maximus Tyrius. In addition to this, he and the other Platonists of the second century paid great attention to the theology adumbrated in those dialogues, and in the earlier books of the *Republic*. But meanwhile Neo-Pythagoreanism had intervened to break the normal line of development, and, under its influence, Plutarch passed at once to the mathematical puzzles of the *Timaeus*. With Plato himself the next step had been to found a state for the application of his new principles; and such was the logic of his system, that the whole stress of adverse circumstances could not prevent the realisation of a similar scheme from being mooted in the third century; while, as we have seen, something more remotely analogous to it was at that very time being carried out by the Christian Church. Plato's own disappointed hopes had found relief in the profoundest metaphysical speculations; and now the time has come when his labours in this direction were to engage the attention hitherto absorbed by the more popular or literary aspects of his teaching.

Now it was by this side of Platonism that Aristotle also had been most deeply fascinated. While constantly criticising the ideal theory, he had, in truth, accepted it under a modified form. His universal classification is derived from the dialectic method. His psychology and theology are constructed on the spiritualistic basis of the Academy, and out of materials which the founder of the Academy had supplied. It was therefore natural that Plotinus should avail himself largely of the Stagirite's help in endeavouring to reproduce what a tradition of six centuries had obscured or confused. To reconcile the two Attic masters was, as we know, a common school exercise. Learned commentators had, indeed, placed their disagreement beyond all dispute. But there remained the simpler course of bringing their common standpoint into greater prominence, and combining their theories where this seemed possible without too openly renouncing the respect due to what almost all considered the superior authority of Plato. To which of the two masters Neo-Platonism really owed most is a question that must be postponed until we have made ourselves acquainted with the outlines of the system as they appear in the works of Plotinus.

IV

It has been already mentioned how large a place was given to erotic questions by the literary Platonists of the second century. Even in the school of Plotinus, Platonic love continued to be discussed, sometimes with a freedom which pained and disgusted the master beyond measure.¹ His first essay was

¹ Porph., *Vita*, cap. xlv.

apparently suggested by a question put to him in the course of some such debate.¹ The subject is beauty. In his treatment of it, we find our philosopher at once rising superior to the indecorous frivolities of his predecessors. Physical beauty he declares to be the ideal element in objects, that which they have received from the creative soul, and which the perceptive soul recognises as akin to her own essence. Love is nothing but the excitement and joy occasioned by this discovery. But to understand the truer and higher forms of beauty, we must turn away from sensible perceptions, and study it as manifested in wise institutions, virtuous habits, and scientific theories. The passionate enthusiasm excited by the contemplation of such qualities as magnanimity, or justice, or wisdom, or valour can only be explained by assuming that they reveal our inmost nature, showing us what we were destined for, what we originally were, but what we have ceased to be. For we need only enumerate the vices which make a soul hideous—injustice, sensuality, cowardice, and the like—to perceive that they are foreign to her real nature, and are imposed on her by contamination with the principle of all evil, which is matter. To be brave means not to dread death, because death is the separation of the soul from the body. Magnanimity means the neglect of earthly interests. Wisdom means the elevation of our thoughts to a higher world. The soul that virtue has thus released becomes pure reason, and reason is just what constitutes her intrinsic beauty. It is also what alone really exists; without it all the rest of nature is nothing. Thus foul is opposed to fair, as evil to good and false to true. Once more, as the soul is beautiful by participation in reason, so reason in its turn depends on a still higher principle, the absolute good to which all things aspire, and from which they are derived—the one source of life, of reason, and of existence. Behind all other loves is the longing for this ultimate good; and in proportion to its superiority over their objects is the intensity of the passion that it inspires, the happiness that its attainment and fruition must bestow. He who would behold this supreme beauty must not seek for it in the fair forms of the external world, for these are but the images and shadows of its glory. It can only be seen with the inward eye, only found in the recesses of our own soul. To comprehend the good we must be good ourselves; or, what is the same thing, we must be ourselves and nothing else. In this process of abstraction, we first arrive at pure reason, and then we say that the ideas of reason are what constitutes beauty. But beyond reason is that highest good of which beauty is merely the outward vesture, the source and principle from which beauty springs.

¹ *Enn.*, I., vi.

It is evident that what Plotinus says about beauty and love was suggested by the well-known passages on the same subject in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. His analysis of aesthetic emotion has, however, a much more abstract and metaphysical character than that of his great model. The whole fiction of an ante-natal existence is quietly let drop. What the sight of sensible beauty awakens in a philosophic soul is not the memory of an ideal beauty beheld in some other world, but the consciousness of its own idealising activity, the dominion that it exercises over unformed and fluctuating matter. And, in all probability, Plato meant no more than this—in fact he hints as much elsewhere,¹—but he was not able or did not choose to express himself with such unmistakable clearness.

Again, this preference for mythological imagery on the part of the more original and poetical thinker seems to be closely connected with a more vivid interest in the practical duties of life. With Plotinus, the primal beauty or supreme good is something that can be isolated from all other beauty and goodness, something to be perceived and enjoyed in absolute seclusion from one's fellow-men. God is, indeed, described as the source and cause of all other good. But neither here nor elsewhere is there a hint that we should strive to resemble him by becoming, in our turn, the cause of good to others. Platonic love, on the contrary, first finds its reality and truth in unremitting efforts for the enlightenment and elevation of others, being related to the transmission of spiritual life just as the love inspired by visible beauty is related to the perpetuation and physical ennoblement of the race.

This preference of pure abstract speculation to beneficent action may be traced to the influence of Aristotle. Some of the most enthusiastic expressions used by Plotinus in speaking of his supreme principle seem to have been suggested by the *Metaphysics* and the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The self-thinking thought of the Stagirite does not, indeed, take the highest rank with him. But it is retained in his system, and is only relegated to a secondary place because, for reasons to be explained hereafter, it does not fulfil equally well with Plato's Idea of Good, the condition of absolute and indivisible unity, without which a first principle could not be conceived by any Greek philosopher. But this apparent return to the standpoint of the *Republic* really involves a still wider departure from its animating spirit. In other words, Plotinus differs from Aristotle as Aristotle himself had differed from Plato; he shares the same speculative tendency, and carries it to a further extreme.

We have also to note that Plotinus arrives at his Absolute

¹ *Meno*, 86, A. (See above, p. 170.)

by a method apparently very different from that pursued by either of his teachers. Plato's primal beauty is, on the face of it, an abstraction and generalisation from all the scattered and imperfect manifestations of beauty to be met with in our objective experience. And Aristotle is led to his conception of an eternal immaterial thought by two lines of analysis, both starting from the phenomena of external nature. The problem of his *Physics* is to account for the perpetuity of motion. The problem of his *Metaphysics* is to explain the transformation of potential into actual existence. Plotinus, on the other hand, is always bidding us to look within. What we admire in the objective world is but a reflex of ourselves. Mind is the sole reality; and to grasp this reality under its highest form, we must become like it. Thus the more we isolate our own personality and self-identity from the other interests and experiences of life, the more nearly do we approach to consciousness of and coalescence with the supreme identity wherein all things have their source.

But on looking at the matter a little more closely, we shall find that Plotinus only set in a clearer light what had all along been the leading motive of his predecessors. In dealing with Plato's philosophy I observed that his whole mythological machinery is only a fanciful way of expressing that independent experience which the mind derives from the study of its own spontaneous activity. And the process of generalisation described in the *Symposium* is really limited to moral phenomena. Plato's standpoint is less individualistic than that of Plotinus in so far as it involves a continual reference to the beliefs, experiences, and wants of other men; but it is equally subjective, in the sense of interpreting all nature by the analogies of human life. There are even occasions when his spiritualism goes the length of inculcating complete withdrawal from the world of common life into an ideal sphere, when he seems to identify evil with matter, when he reduces all virtue to contempt for the interests of the body, in language which his Alexandrian successor could adopt without any modification of its obvious meaning.¹

So also with Aristotle. As a naturalist, he is, indeed, purely objective; but when he offers a general explanation of the world, the subjective element introduced by Protagoras and Socrates at once reappears. Simple absolute self-consciousness is for him the highest good, the animating principle of nature, the secret of constructive Reason, the most complete reality, and the only one that would remain, were the element of nonentity to disappear from this world. The utter misconception of dynamic phenomena which marks his physics and astronomy

¹ *Theaetetus*, 176, A; *Phaedo*, 67, B sqq.

can only be accounted for by his desire to give life the priority over mechanical motion, and reason the priority over life. Thus his metaphysical method is essentially identical with the introspective method recommended by Plotinus, and, if fully worked out, might have led to the same results.

I cannot, then, agree with Zeller, when he groups the Neo-Platonists together with the other post-Aristotelian schools, on the ground that they are all alike distinguished from Plato and Aristotle by the exclusive attention which they pay to subjective and practical, as opposed to scientific and theoretical interests. It seems to me that such distinctions are out of relation to the historical order in which the different systems of Greek philosophy were evolved. It is not in the substance of their teaching, but in their diminished power of original speculation, that the thinkers who came after Aristotle offer the strongest contrast to their predecessors. In so far as they are exclusively practical and subjective, they follow the Humanists and Socrates. In so far as they combine Socratic tendencies with physical studies, they imitate the method of Plato and Aristotle. Their cosmopolitan naturalism is inherited from the Cynics in the first instance, more remotely from the physiocratic Sophists, and, perhaps, in the last resort, from Heracleitus. Their religion is traceable either to Pythagoras, to Socrates, or to Plato. Their scepticism is only a little more developed than that of Protagoras and the Cyrenaics. But if we seek for some one principle held in common by all these later schools, and held by none of the earlier schools, we shall seek for it in vain. The imitative systems are separated from one another by the same fundamental differences as those which divide the original systems. Now, in both periods, the deepest of all differences is that which divides the spiritualists from the materialists. In both periods, also, it is materialism that comes first. And in both, the transition from one doctrine to the other is marked by the exclusive prominence given to subjective, practical, sceptical, or theological interests in philosophy; by the enthusiastic culture of rhetoric in general education; and by a strong religious reaction in the upper ranks of society.

Thus one can quite agree with Zeller when he observes¹ that Neo-Platonism only carried out a tendency towards spiritualism which had been already manifesting itself among the later Stoics, and had been still further developed by the Neo-Pythagoreans. But what does this prove? Not what Zeller contends for, which is that Neo-Platonism stands on the same ground with the other post-Aristotelian systems, but simply that a recurrence of the same intellectual conditions was being followed by a recurrence of the same results. Now, as before,

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 427.

materialism was proving its inadequacy to account for the facts of mental experience. Now, as before, morality, after being cut off from physical laws, was seeking a basis in religious or metaphysical ideas. Now, as before, the study of thoughts was succeeding to the study of words, and the methods of popular persuasion were giving place to the methods of dialectical demonstration. Of course, the age of Plotinus was far inferior to the age of Plato in vitality, in genius, and in general enlightenment, notwithstanding the enormous extension which Roman conquest had given to the superficial area of civilisation, as the difference between the *Enneads* and the *Dialogues* would alone suffice to prove. But this does not alter the fact that the general direction of their movement proceeds on parallel lines.

In saying that the post-Aristotelian philosophers were not original thinkers, we must guard against the supposition that they contributed nothing of value to thought. On the contrary, while not putting forward any new theories, they generalised some of the principles borrowed from their predecessors, worked out others in minute detail, and stated the arguments on both sides of every controverted point with superior dialectic precision. Thus, while materialism had been assumed as self-evidently true by the pre-Socratic schools, it was maintained by the Stoics and Epicureans on what seemed to be grounds of experience and reason. And, similarly, we find that Plotinus, having arrived at the consciousness that spiritualism is the common ground on which Plato and Aristotle stand, the connecting trait which most completely distinguishes them from their successors, proceeds in his second essay¹ to argue the case against materialism more powerfully than it had ever been argued before, and with nearly as much effect as it has ever been argued since.

V

Our personality, says the Alexandrian philosopher, cannot be a property of the body, for this is composed of parts, and is in a state of perpetual flux. A man's self, then, is his soul; and the soul cannot be material, for the ultimate elements of matter are inanimate, and it is inconceivable that animation and reason should result from the aggregation of particles which, taken singly, are destitute of both; while, even were it possible, their disposition in a certain order would argue the presence of an intelligence controlling them from without. The Stoics themselves admit the force of these considerations, when they attribute reason to the fiery element or vital breath by which,

¹ *Enn.*, iv., 7.

according to them, all things are shaped. They do, indeed, talk about a certain elementary disposition as the principle of animation, but this disposition is either identical with the matter possessing it, in which case the difficulties already mentioned recur, or distinct from it, in which case the animating principle still remains to be accounted for.

Again, to suppose that the soul shares in the changes of the body is incompatible with the self-identity which memory reveals. To suppose that it is an extended substance is incompatible with its simultaneous presence, as an indivisible whole, at every point to which its activity reaches ; as well as with the circumstances that all our sensations, though received through different organs, are referred to a common centre of consciousness. If the sensorium is a fluid body it will have no more power of retaining impressions than water ; while, if it is a solid, new impressions will either not be received at all, or only when the old impressions are effaced.

Passing from sensation to thought, it is admitted that abstract conceptions are incorporeal : how, then, can they be received and entertained by a corporeal substance ? Or what possible connexion can there be between different arrangements of material particles and such notions as temperance and justice ? This is already a sufficiently near approach to the language of modern philosophy. In another essay, which according to the original arrangement stands third, and must have been composed immediately after that whence the foregoing arguments are transcribed, there is more than an approach, there is complete coincidence.¹ To deduce mind from atoms is, says Plotinus, if we may so speak, still more impossible than to deduce it from the elementary bodies. Granting that the atoms have a natural movement downwards, granting that they suffer a lateral deflection and so impinge on one another, still this could do no more than produce a disturbance in the bodies against which they strike. But to what atomic movement can one attribute psychic energies and affections ? What sort of collision in the vertical line of descent, or in the oblique line of deflection, or in any direction you please, will account for the appearance of a particular kind of reasoning or mental impulse or thought, or how can it account for the existence of such processes at all ? Here, of course, Plotinus is alluding to the Epicureans ; but it is with the Stoic and other schools that he is principally concerned, and so we return to his attack on their psychology.

The activities of the soul are thought, sensation, reasoning, desire, attention, and so forth : the activities of body are heat, cold, impact, and gravitation ; if to these we add the characteristics of mind, body will have no special properties by which it

¹ *Enn.*, iii., 1, 3.

can be known. And even in body we distinguish between quantity and quality; the former, at most, being corporeal, and the latter not corporeal at all. Here Plotinus just touches the idealistic method of modern spiritualism, but fails to follow it any further. He seems to have adopted Aristotle's natural realism as a sufficient theory of external perception, and to have remained uninfluenced by Plato's distrust of sensible appearances.

After disposing of the Stoic materialism, according to which the soul, though distinct from the body, is, equally with it, an extended and resisting substance, our philosopher proceeds to discuss the theories which make it a property or function of the body. The Pythagorean notion of the soul as a harmony of the body is met by a reproduction of the well-known arguments used against it in Plato's *Phaedo*. Then comes the Aristotelian doctrine that the soul is the entelechy—that is to say, the realised purpose and perfection—of the physical organism to which it belongs. This is an idea which Aristotle himself had failed to make very clear, and the inadequacy of which he had virtually acknowledged by ascribing a different origin to reason, although this is counted as one of the psychic faculties. Plotinus, at any rate, could not appreciate an explanation which, whatever else it implied, certainly involved a considerable departure from his own dualistic interpretation of the difference between spirit and matter. He could not enter into Aristotle's view of the one as a lower and less concentrated form of the other. The same arguments which had already been employed against Stoicism are now turned against the Peripatetic psychology. The soul as a principle, not only of memory and desire, but even of nutrition, is declared to be independent of and separable from the body. And, finally, as a result of the whole controversy, its immortality is affirmed. But how far this immortality involves the belief in a prolongation of personal existence after death is a point which still remains uncertain. The question will be resumed in dealing with the religious opinions of Plotinus.

Closely connected with the materialism of the Stoics, and equally adverse to the principles of Plato and Aristotle, was their fatalism. In opposition to this, Plotinus proceeds to develop the spiritualistic doctrine of free-will.¹ In the previous discussion, we had to notice how closely his arguments resemble those employed by more modern controversialists. No less marked a difference between the two has here to be pointed out. Instead of presenting free-will as a fact of consciousness which is itself irreconcilable with the dependence of mental on material changes, our philosopher,

¹ *Enn.*, iii., 1.

conversely, infers that the soul must be free both from the conditions of mechanical causation and from the general interdependence of natural forces, because it is an individual substance.¹ In truth, the phenomena of volition were handled by the ancient philosophers with a vagueness and a feebleness offering the most singular contrast to their powerful and discriminating grasp of other psychological problems. Of necessarianism, in the modern sense, they had no idea. Aristotle failed to see that, quite apart from external restraints, our choice may conceivably be determined with the utmost rigour by an internal motive; nor could he understand that the circumstances which make a man responsible for his actions do not amount to a release of his conduct from the law of universal causation. In this respect, Plato saw somewhat deeper than his disciple, but created fresh confusion by identifying freedom with the supremacy of reason over irrational desire.² Plotinus generally adopts the Platonist point of view. According to this, the soul is free when she is extricated from the bonds of matter, and determined solely by the conditions of her spiritual existence. Thus virtue is not so much free as identical with freedom; while, contrariwise, vice means enslavement to the affections of the body, and therefore comes under the domain of material causation.³ Yet, again, in criticising the fatalistic theories which represent human actions as entirely predetermined by divine providence, he protests against the ascription of so much that is evil to so good a source, and insists that at least the bad actions of men are due to their own free choice.⁴

In vindicating human freedom, Plotinus had to encounter a difficulty exceedingly characteristic of his age. This was the astrological superstition that everything depended on the stars, and that the future fate of every person might be predicted by observing their movements and configurations at the time of his birth. Philosophers found it much easier to demolish the pretensions of astrology by an abstract demonstration of their absurdity, than to get rid of the supposed

¹ Ἀλλὰ γὰρ δεῖ καὶ ἑκάστων ἑκάστων εἶναι καὶ πράξεις ἡμετέρας καὶ διαβολὰς ὑπάρχειν. iii., i., 4, Kirchh., i., p. 38, l. 22. So utterly incapable is Vacherot of placing himself at this point of view, that he actually reads into the words quoted an argument in favour of free-will based on the testimony of consciousness. His version runs as follows:—'Nous savons et nous croyons fermement par le sentiment de ce qui se passe en nous que les individus (les âmes) vivent, agissent, pensent, d'une vie, d'une action, d'une pensée qui leur est propre.'—*Histoire Critique de l'École d'Alexandrie*, i., p. 514. So far as my knowledge goes, such an appeal to consciousness is not to be found in any ancient writer.

² See *Legg.*, 861, A. *sqq.* for an attempt to prove that men may properly be punished for actions committed through ignorance of their real good. This passage is one of the grounds used by Teichmüller, in his *Literarische Fehden*, to establish the rather paradoxical thesis that Aristotle published his *Ethics* before Plato's death.

³ iii., i., 10.

⁴ *Cap. 4, sub fin.*

facts which were currently quoted in their favour. That fortunes could be foretold on the strength of astronomical calculations with as much certainty as eclipses, seems to have been an accepted article of belief in the time of Plotinus, and one that he does not venture to dispute. He is therefore obliged to satisfy himself with maintaining that the stars do not cause, but merely foreshow the future, in the same manner as the flight of birds, to the prophetic virtue of which he also attaches implicit credence. All parts of nature are connected by such an intimate sympathy, that each serves as a clue to the rest; and, on this principle, the stars may be regarded as the letters of a scripture in which the secrets of futurity are revealed.¹

How much originality there may be in the anti-materialistic arguments of Plotinus we cannot tell. He certainly marks a great advance on Plato and Aristotle, approximating, in this respect, much more closely than they do to the modern standpoint. The indivisibility and permanence of mind had, no doubt, been strongly insisted on by those teachers, in contrast with the extended and fluctuating nature of body. But they did not, like him, deduce these characteristics from a direct analysis of consciousness as such. Plato inferred the simplicity and self-identity of mind from the simplicity and self-identity of the ideas which it contemplates. Aristotle went a step further, or perhaps only expressed the same meaning more clearly, when he associated immateriality with the identity of subject and object in thought.² Moreover, both Plato and Aristotle seem to have rested the whole spiritualistic case on objective rather than on subjective considerations; although, as we have seen, the subjective interest was what dominated all the while in their thoughts. Starting with the analogy of a living body, Plato argues, both in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Laws*, that soul must everywhere be the first cause of motion, and therefore must exist prior to body.³ The elaborate scientific analysis of Aristotle's *Physics* leads up to a similar conclusion; and the ontological analysis of the *Metaphysics* starts with the distinction between Form and Matter in bodies, to end with the question of their relative priority, and of the objective machinery by which they are united. Plotinus, too, sometimes refers to mind as the source of physical order; but this is rather in deference to his authorities than because the necessity of such an explanation seemed to him, as it did to them, the deepest ground of a spiritualistic philosophy. On the other hand, his psychological arguments

¹ Capp. 6 and 7, Cp. *Enn.*, ii., 3; Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 567 *sqq.*; Kirchner, *Ph. d. Plot.*, p. 195.

² Plato, *Phaedo*, 79, A *sqq.*; Aristot., *De An.*, iii., 4, *sub fin.*

³ *Phaedr.*, 245, C; *Legg.*, 892, A.

for the immateriality of the soul are drawn from a wider area of experience than theirs, feeling being taken into account no less than thought; instead of restricting himself to one particular kind of cognition for evidence of spiritual power, he looks for it in every manifestation of living personality.

In criticising the Stoic system as a whole, the New Academy and the later Sceptics had incidentally dwelt on sundry absurdities which followed from the materialistic interpretation of knowledge; and Plotinus evidently derived some of his most forcible objections from their writings; but no previous philosopher that I know of had set forth the whole case for spiritualism and against materialism with such telling effect. And what is, perhaps, more important than any originality in detail, is the profound insight shown in choosing this whole question of spiritualism *versus* materialism for the ground whereon the combined forces of Plato and Aristotle were to fight their first battle against the naturalistic system which had triumphed over them five centuries before. It was on dialectical and ethical grounds that the controversy between Porch and Academy, on ethical and religious grounds that the controversy between Epicureanism and all other schools of philosophy, had hitherto been conducted. Cicero and Plutarch never allude to their opponents as materialists. Only once, in his polemic against Colôtes, does Plutarch observe that neither a soul nor anything else could be made out of atoms, but this is because the atoms are discrete, not because they are extended.¹ For the rest, Plutarch's method is to trip up his opponents by pointing out their inconsistencies, rather than to cut the ground from under their feet by proving that their theory of the universe is wrong.

Under such guidance as this, Platonism had made but little way. We saw, in the concluding sections of the last chapter and in the opening section of the present chapter, that it profited by the religious and literary revival of the second century, just as it was to profit long afterwards by the greater revival of the fifteenth century, so much so as to become the fashionable philosophy of the age. Yet, even in that period of its renewed splendour, the noblest of contemporary thinkers was not a Platonist but a Stoic; and although it would be unfair to measure the moral distance between the Porch and the Academy by the interval which separates an Aurelius from an Apuleius, still it would seem as if naturalism continued to be the chosen creed of strenuous and dutiful endeavour, while spiritualism was drifting into an alliance with hysterical and sensuous superstition. If we may judge by the points which Sextus Empiricus selects for controversial treatment, Stoicism

¹ *Adv. Col.*, ix., 3.

was still the reigning system in his time, that is to say, about the beginning of the third century; and if, a generation later, it had sunk into neglect, every rival school, except that of Epicurus, was in exactly the same condition. Thus the only advance made was to substitute one form of materialism for another, until Neo-Platonism came and put an end to their disputes by destroying the common foundation on which they stood; while, at the same time, it supplied a completely organised doctrine round which the nobler elements of the Hellenic revival could rally for a last stand against the foes that were threatening it from every side.

VI

We have seen how Plotinus establishes the spiritualistic basis of his philosophy. We have now to see how he works out from it in all directions, developing the results of his previous enquiries into a complete metaphysical system. It will have been observed that the whole method of reasoning by which materialism was overthrown, rested on the antithesis between the unity of consciousness and the divisibility of corporeal substance. Very much the same method was afterwards employed by Cartesianism to demonstrate the same conclusion. But with Descartes and his followers, the opposition between soul and body was absolute, the former being defined as pure thought, the latter as pure extension. Hence the extreme difficulty which they experienced in accounting for the evident connexion between the two. The spiritualism of Plotinus did not involve any such impassable chasm between consciousness and its object. According to him, although the soul is contained in or depends on an absolutely self-identical unity, she is not herself that unity, but in some degree shares the characters of divisibility and extension.¹ If we conceive all existence as bounded at either extremity by two principles, the one extended and the other inextended, then soul will still stand midway between them; not divided in herself, but divided in respect to the bodies that she animates. Plotinus holds that such an assumption is necessitated by the facts of sensation. A feeling of pain, for example, is located in a particular point of the body, and is, at the same time, apprehended as my feeling, not as some one else's. A similar synthesis obtains through the whole of nature. The visible universe consists of many heterogeneous parts, held together by a single animating principle. And we can trace the same qualities and figures through a multitude of concrete individuals, their essential unity remaining unbroken,

¹ *Enn.* iv., 2, 1.

notwithstanding the dispersion of the objects in which they inhere.

Here Plotinus avowedly follows the teaching of Plato, who, in the *Timæus*, describes Being or Substance as composed by mingling the indivisible and unchanging with the divisible and corporeal principle.¹ And, although there is no express reference, we know that in placing soul between the two, he was equally following Plato. It is otherwise in the next essay, which undertakes to give a more explicit analysis of psychical phenomena.² The soul, we are told, consists, like external objects, of two elements related to one another as Form and Matter. These are reason and sense. The office of the former is, primarily, to enlighten and control the latter. Plato had already pointed to such a distinction; but Aristotle was the first to work it out clearly, and to make it the hinge of his whole system. It is, accordingly, under the guidance of Aristotle that Plotinus proceeds in what he has next to say. Just as there is a soul of the world corresponding to our soul, so also, he argues, there must be a universal objective Reason outside and above the world. In speaking of this Reason, I shall, for clearness' sake, in general call it by its Greek name, Nous. Nous, according to Aristotle, is the faculty by which we apprehend abstract ideas; it is self-thinking thought; and, as such, it is the prime mover of nature. Plotinus adopts the first two positions unreservedly, and the third to a certain extent; while he brings all three into combination with the Platonic theory of ideas. It had always been an insuperable difficulty in the way of Plato's teaching that it necessitated, or seemed to necessitate, the unintelligible notion of ideas existing without any mind to think them. For a disciple of Aristotle, the difficulty ceases to exist if the archetypal essences assumed by Plato are conceived as residing in an eternal Nous. But, on the other hand, how are we to reconcile such an accommodation with Aristotle's principle, that the Supreme Intelligence can think nothing but itself? Simply by generalising from the same master's doctrine that the human Nous is identical with the ideas which it contemplates. Thought and its object are everywhere one. Thus, according to Plotinus, the absolute Nous embraces the totality of archetypes or forms which we see reflected and embodied in the material universe. In thinking them, it thinks itself, not passing from one to the other as in discursive reasoning, nor bringing them into existence by the act of thought, but apprehending them as simultaneously present realities.

To explain how the Nous could be identical with a number of distinct ideas was a difficult problem. We shall see at a

¹ *Op. cit.*, *sub fin.*; *Tim.*, 35, A.

² *Enn.*, v., 9.

more advanced stage of the exposition how Plotinus endeavoured to solve it with the help of Plato's *Sophistês*. In the essay where his theory is first put forward, he cuts the knot by asserting that each idea virtually contains every other, while each in its actual and separate existence is, so to speak, an independent Nous. But correlation is not identity; and to say that each idea thinks itself is not to explain how the same subject can think, and in thinking be identical with all. The personal identity of the thinking subject still stands in unreconciled opposition to the multitude of thoughts which it entertains, whether successively or in a single intuition. Of two things one: either the unity of the Nous or the diversity of its ideas must be sacrificed. Plotinus evades the alternative by a kind of three-card trick. Sometimes his ideal unity is to be found under the notion of convergence to a common centre, sometimes under the notion of participation in a common property, sometimes under the notion of mutual equivalence.

The confusion was partly inherited from Aristotle. When discussing the psychology of that philosopher, I suggested that his active Nous is no other than the idea of our self-distinguishing personality; while the passive or receptive Nous is the reasoning faculty whose identity is lost in the multiplicity of objects with which it becomes identified in turn. But Aristotle was careful not to let the personality of God, or the supreme Nous, be endangered by resolving it into the totality of substantial forms which constitute nature. God is self-conscious in the strictest sense. He thinks nothing but himself. Again, the subjective starting-point of Plotinus may have affected his conception of the universal Nous. A single individual may isolate himself from his fellows in so far as he is a sentient being; he cannot do so in so far as he is a rational being. His reason always addresses itself to the reason of some one else—a fact nowhere brought out so clearly as in the dialectic philosophy of Socrates and Plato. Then, when an agreement has been established, their minds, before so sharply divided, seem to be, after all, only different personifications of the same universal spirit. Hence reason, no less than its objects, comes to be conceived as both many and one.

After his preliminary analysis of Nous, we find Plotinus working out in two directions from the conception so obtained.¹ He begins by explaining in what relation the human soul stands to the universal reason. To him, personally, it seemed as if the world of thought into which he penetrated by reflecting on his own inmost essence was so much the real home of his soul that her presence in a bodily habitation presented itself as a difficulty requiring to be cleared up. In this connexion, he

¹ *Enn.*, iv., 8.

refers to the opinions of the Pythagoreans, who looked on our earthly life as an unmixed evil, a punishment for some sin committed in a former stage of existence. Their views seem to have been partly shared by Plato. Sometimes he calls the body a prison and a tomb into which the soul has fallen from her original abode. Yet, in his *Timaeus*, he glorifies the visible world, and tells us that the universal soul was divinely appointed to give it life and reason ; while our individual souls have also their part to play in perfecting the same providential scheme.

It is to the second theory that Plotinus evidently leans. However closely his life may have been conformed to the Pythagorean model—a point with respect to which we have nothing better than the very prejudiced statements of Porphyry to rely on—there is no trace of Pythagorean asceticism in his writings. Hereafter we shall see how hostile he was to Gnostic pessimism. In the preceding essay he had already specified admiration for physical beauty as a first and necessary step in the soul's ascent to a contemplation of spiritual realities ;¹ and now it is under the guidance of Plato's later speculations that he proceeds to account for her descent from that higher world to the restraints of matter and of sense.

With regard to the universal soul of nature, there is, indeed, no difficulty whatever. In giving a sensible realisation to the noetic ideas, she suffers no degradation or pollution by contact with the lower elements of matter. Enthroned on the outer verge of the cosmos, she governs the whole course of nature by a simple exercise of volition, and in the enjoyment of a felicity which remains undisturbed by passion or desire. But just as we have seen the supreme Nous resolving itself into a multitude of individual intelligences, so also does the cosmic soul produce many lesser or partial souls of which our own is one. Now these derivative souls cannot all be equal, for that would be to defeat the purpose of creation, which is to realise all the possibilities of creation from the highest to the lowest. Thus each has an office corresponding to her place in the scale of perfection.² We may say of the human soul that she stoops to conquer. Her mission is to cope with the more recalcitrant forms of matter. It is to the struggle with their impurities that the troubles and passions of our life are due. By yielding to earthly temptations, we suffer a second fall, and one much more real than the first ; by overcoming them, as is perfectly in our power to do, we give scope and exercise to faculties which

¹ *Enn.*, v., 9, 2.

² Readers of Pope's *Essay on Man* will recognise this argument. It was, in fact, borrowed from Plotinus by Leibniz—unless he took it from Spinoza—and handed on through Bolingbroke to Pope.

would otherwise have remained dormant and unknown. Moreover, our soul retains the privilege of returning to her former abode, enriched by the experience acquired in this world, and with that clearer perception of good which the knowledge of its opposite alone can supply. Nay, paradoxical as the assertion may seem, she has not entirely descended to earth, but remains in partial communication with the noetic world by virtue of her reasoning faculty ; that is to say when its intuitions are not darkened and disturbed by the triumph of sensuous impressions over the lower soul. On this and on many other occasions, Plotinus betrays a glimmering consciousness that his philosophy is purely subjective, and that its attempted transcendentalism is, in truth, a projection of psychological distinctions into the external world. Starting with the familiar division of human nature into body, soul, and spirit (or reason), he endeavours to find an objective counterpart for each. Body is represented by the material universe, soul by the animating principle of nature, reason by the extramundane Nous. Under these three heads is comprised the totality of real existence ; but existence itself has to be accounted for by a principle lying above and beyond it, which has still to be obtained by an effort of abstraction from the data that self-consciousness supplies.¹

In his very first essay, Plotinus had hinted at a principle higher and more primordial than the absolute Nous, something with which the soul is connected by the mediation of Nous, just as she herself mediates between Nous and the material world. The notion of such a supreme principle was derived from Plato. In the sixth and seventh books of the *Republic*, we are told that at the summit of the dialectic series stands an idea to grasp which is the ultimate object of all reasoning. Plato calls this the Idea of Good, and describes it as holding a place in the intellectual world analogous to that held by the sun in the physical world. For, just as the sun brings all visible things into being, and also gives the light by which they are seen, so also the Good is not only that by which the objects of knowledge are known, but also that whence their existence is derived, while at the same time itself transcending existence in dignity and power.²

Plato's supreme good was subsequently replaced in the *Timæus* by the Idea of Identity, where it is correlated with the Idea of Difference, Existence being formed by varying combinations of the two ; while the same thought appears in the

¹ Kirchner, *Ph. d. Plot.*, p. 35. The triad of body, soul, and spirit is still to be met with in modern popular philosophy ; but, contrary to the Greek order of priority, there is a noticeable tendency to rank soul, as the seat of emotion, higher than spirit or pure reason, particularly among persons whose opinions receive little countenance from the last-mentioned faculty.

² *Rep.*, vi., 508, C *sqq.* ; viii., 517 C.

union of the Limit and the Unlimited represented as the Supreme Good by the Socrates of the *Philebus*. And if we are to believe what Aristotle tells us about the later teaching of Plato, it seems to have finally coalesced with the Pythagorean One, which combines with the unlimited Dyad to form first number, and then everything else, just as the Same combines with the Different to form existence in the *Timæus*.¹

For the Platonic Idea of Good, Aristotle had substituted his own conception of self-thinking thought, as the absolute on which all nature hangs: and we have seen how Plotinus follows him to the extent of admitting that this visible universe is under the immediate control of an incorporeal Reason, which also serves as a receptacle for the Platonic Ideas. But what satisfied Aristotle does not fully satisfy him. The first principle must be one, and Nous fails to answer the conditions of absolute unity. Even self-thinking thought involves the elementary dualism of object and subject. Again, as Plotinus somewhat gratuitously assumes, Nous, being knowledge, must cognise something simpler than itself.² Or, perhaps, what he means is that in Nous, which is its product, the first principle becomes self-conscious. Consciousness means a check on the outflow of energy due to the restraining action of the One, a return to and reflection on itself of the creative power.³

If the necessity of the One is proved by the inward differentiation of what seems most simple, it is also proved by the integration of what seems most divided. In his next essay, our philosopher wanders off from the investigation of what he has just begun, by abruptly starting the question whether all souls are one.⁴ This question is, however, most intimately connected with his main theme. He answers it in the affirmative. Strictly personal as our feelings seem, we are, in reality, one with each other, through our joint participation in the world-soul. Love and sympathy among human beings are solely due to this connexion. Plotinus mentions, as another evidence of its reality, the secret affinities called into play even at a great distance by magical spells—an allusion very characteristic of his age.⁵ What prevents us from more fully perceiving the unity of all souls is the separateness of the bodies with which they are associated. Matter is the principle of individuation. But even within the soul there is a division between the rational and the irrational part, concentration being the characteristic of the one and dispersion of the other.

¹ Aristot., *Metaph.*, i., 6.

² *Enn.*, v., 4, 2; Kirchh., i., p. 72, l. 8.

³ This is the method of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, which seems to show that Fichte was acquainted with Neo-Platonism, probably at secondhand.

⁴ *Enn.*, iv., 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3; Kirchh., i., p. 75, l. 24.

The inferior constituent is fitted by its divided nature for presiding over the bodily functions of sensation and nutrition ; and with the dissolution of the body it returns to the unity of the higher soul. There are two ways in which we can account for this pervading unity. It is either as products or as portions of the universal soul that all particular souls are one. Plotinus combines both explanations. The world-soul first gives birth to an image of itself, and then this is subdivided into as many partial souls as there are bodies requiring animation.

On extending our survey still wider, we find that the existence of a thing everywhere depends on its unity.¹ All bodies perish by dissolution, and dissolution means the loss of unity. Health, beauty, and virtue are merely so many different kinds of harmony and unison. Shall we then say that soul, as the great unifying power in nature, is the One of which we are in search ? Not so ; for preceding investigations have taught us that soul is only an agent for transmitting ideas received from a higher power ; and the psychic faculties themselves are held together by a unifying principle for which we have to account. Neither is the whole sum of existence the One, for its very name implies a plurality of parts. And the claims of the *Nous* to that distinction have been already disproved. In short, nothing that exists can be the One, for, as we have seen, unity is the cause of existence and must therefore precede it.

'What then,' asks Plotinus, 'is the One? No easy question to answer for us whose knowledge is based on ideas, and who can hardly tell what ideas are, or what is existence itself. The farther the soul advances in this formless region, where there is nothing for her to grasp, nothing whose impress she can receive, the more does her footing fail her, the more helpless and desolate does she feel. Oftentimes she wearies of such searching and is glad to leave it all and to descend into the world of sense until she finds rest on the solid earth, as the eyes are relieved in turning from small objects to large. For she does not know that to be one herself is to have gained the object of her search, for then she is no other than that which she knows. Nevertheless it is only by this method that we can master the philosophy of the One. Since, then, what we seek is one, and since we are considering the first principle of all things and the Good, he who enters on this quest must not place himself afar from the things that are first by descending to the things that are last, but he must leave the objects of sense, and, freed from all evil, ascend to the first principle of his own nature, that by becoming one, instead of many, he may behold the beginning and the One. Therefore he must become Reason, trusting his soul to Reason for guidance and support, that she may wakefully receive what it sees, and with this he must behold the One, not admitting any element of sense, but gazing on the purest with pure Reason and with that which in Reason is first. Should he who addresses

¹ *Enn.*, vi., 9.

himself to this enterprise imagine that the object of his vision possesses magnitude or form or bulk, then Reason is not his guide, for such perceptions do not belong to its nature but to sense and to the opinion which follows on sense. No ; we must only pledge Reason to perform what it can do. Reason sees what precedes, or what contains, or what is derived from itself. Pure are the things in it, purer still those which precede, or rather that which precedes it. This is neither reason nor anything that is ; for whatever is has the form of existence, whereas this has none, not even an ideal form. For the One, whose nature is to generate all things, cannot be any of those things itself. Therefore it is neither substance, nor quality, nor reason, nor soul ; neither moving nor at rest, not in place, not in time, but unique of its kind, or rather kindless, being before all kind, before motion and before rest, for these belong to being, and are that to which its multiplicity is due. Why, then, if it does not move, is it not at rest ? Because while one or both of these must be attributed to being, the very act of attribution involves a distinction between subject and predicate, which is impossible in the case of what is absolutely simple.¹

The One cannot, properly speaking, be an object of knowledge, but is apprehended by something higher than knowledge. That is why Plato calls it ineffable and indescribable. What we can describe is the way to the view, not the view itself. The soul that has never been irradiated with the light of that supreme splendour, nor filled with the passionate joy of a lover finding rest in the contemplation of his beloved, cannot be given that experience in words. But the beatific vision is open to all. He from whom it is hidden has only himself to blame. Let him break away from the restraints of sense and place himself under the guidance of philosophy, that philosophy which leads from matter to spirit, from soul to Nous, from Nous to the One.

Plotinus himself, we are told, reached the climax of complete unification several times in his life, Porphyry only once, in the sixty-eighth year of his age. Probably the condition so denominated was a species of hypnotic trance. Its importance in the Neo-Platonic system has been considerably exaggerated ; and on the strength of this single point some critics have summarily disposed of Plotinus and his whole school as unreasoning mystics. Mysticism is a vague word capable of very various applications. In the present instance, it is presumably used to express a belief in the existence of some method for the discovery of truth apart from tradition, observation, and reasoning. And, taken in this sense, the Neo-Platonic method of arriving at a full apprehension of the One would be considered an extreme instance of Mysticism. We must bear in mind, however, that Plotinus arrives at an intellectual conception of

¹ *Enn.*, vi., 9, 3 ; Kirchh., i., pp. 81 sqq.

absolute unity by the most strictly logical process. It makes no difference that his reasoning is unsound, for the same criticism applies to other philosophers who have never been accused of mysticism. It may be said that after leading us up to a certain point, reason is replaced by intuition. Rather, what the ultimate intuition does is not to take the place of logic, but to substitute a living realisation for an abstract and negative conception. Moreover, the intuition is won not by forsaking logic, but by straining its resources to the very utmost. Again, one great characteristic of mysticism, as ordinarily understood, is to deny the truth of common observation and reasoning. But Plotinus never goes this length. He does not even share Plato's distrust of sensible impressions, but rather follows the example of Aristotle in recognising their validity within a certain sphere. Nor does he mention having received any revelations of divine truth during his intercourse with the absolute One. This alone marks an immense difference between his ecstasies—if such they can be called—and those of the Christian mystics with whom he is associated by Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire.¹

It may be said that the One is itself a mystical conception, involving a reversal of all our ordinary beliefs. The universe is a vast multiplicity of objects, held together, if you will, by some secret bond of union possibly related to the personal unity of consciousness, but still neither lost in nor confused with its identity. Precisely; but Plotinus himself fully admits as much. His One is the cause of existence, not existence itself. He knows just as well as we do, that the abstract idea of unity has no reality apart from the mind. But if so, why should he associate it, in the true mystical style, with the transports of amorous passion? The question is pertinent; but it might be addressed to other Greek systems as well. We must remember that Plotinus is only commenting and enlarging on Plato. In the *Republic* also, the Idea of Good is described as transcending the existence and the knowledge which it produces,² and in the *Symposium*, the absolute self-beautiful, which seems to be the Good under another name, is spoken of in terms not less passionately enthusiastic than any applied by Plotinus to the vision of the One.³ Doubtless the practical sense of the great Attic master did not desert him even here: the object of all thought, in its widest sweep and in its highest flight, is to find room for every possible expansion of knowledge, for every

¹ In the introductory essay prefixed to his work *De l'École d'Alexandrie*.

² οὕτω δὲ καλῶν ἀμφοτέρων ὄντων, γνώσεώς τε καὶ ἀληθείας, ἄλλο καὶ κάλλιον ἔτι τούτων.—*Rep.* 508, E. οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.—*Ibid.*, 509, B.

³ *Symp.*, 211, E sq.

possible elevation of life. Plotinus was a stranger to such broad views; but in departing from Plato, as usual he follows Aristotle. The absolute self-thinking thought of the Stagirite is, when we examine it closely, only one degree less chimerical than the Neo-Platonic unification. For it means consciousness of self without the correlative consciousness of a not-self; and as such, according to Aristotle, it affords an eternal felicity equal or superior to the best and happiest moments of our sensitive human life. What Plotinus does is to isolate personal identity from reason and, as such, to make it at once the cause and the supreme ideal of existence. This involves two errors: first, a false abstraction of one subjective phenomenon from the sum total of conscious life; and, secondly, an illegitimate generalisation of this abstraction into an objective law of things. But in both errors, Aristotle had preceded him, by dissociating reason from all other mental functions, and by then attributing the whole cosmic movement to the love which this isolated faculty of reason, in its absolute self-existence, for ever inspires. And he also set the example of associating happiness, which is an emotional state, with an intellectual abstraction from which emotion is necessarily excluded.

Again, the Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics all pass for being absolute rationalists. Yet their common ideal of impassive self-possession, when worked out to its logical consequences, becomes nearly indistinguishable from the self-simplification of Plotinus. All alike exhibit the Greek tendency towards endless abstraction—what I have called the analytical moment of Greek thought, working together with the moments of antithesis and circumscription. The Sceptical isolation of man from nature, the Epicurean isolation of the individual from the community, the Stoic isolation of will from feeling, reached their highest and most abstract expression in the Neo-Platonic isolation of pure self-identity from all other modes of consciousness and existence combined.

In estimating the intellectual character of Plotinus, we must also remember that the theory of the absolute One occupies a relatively small place in his speculations; while, at a rough computation, the purely mystical portions of his writings—by which I understand those in which allusion is made to personal and incommunicable experiences of his own—do not amount to more than one per cent. of the whole. If these have attracted more attention than all the rest put together, the reason probably is that they offer an agreeable relief to the arid scholasticism which fills so much of the *Enneads*, and that they are the only very original contribution made by Plotinus to Greek literature. But the significance of a writer must not always be measured by his most original passages; and this is

eminently true of our philosopher. His great merit was to make the spiritualism of Plato and Aristotle more intelligible and interesting than it had been before, and to furnish reason with a rallying-point when it was threatened with utter destruction by the religious revival of the empire.

VII

So far our investigation has been analytical. We have seen Plotinus acquire, one after another, the elements out of which his system has still to be constructed. The first step was to separate spirit from matter. They are respectively distinguished as principles of union and of division. The bodies given to us in experience are a combination of the two, a dispersion of form over an infinitely extended, infinitely divisible, infinitely changeful substratum. Our own souls, which at first seemed so absolutely self-identical, present, on examination, a similarly composite character. A fresh analysis results in the separation of *Nous* or Reason from the lower functions of conscious life. And we infer by analogy that the soul in nature bears the same relation to a transcendent objective *Nous*. *Nous* is essentially pure self-consciousness, and from this self-consciousness the world of Ideas is developed. Properly speaking, Ideas are the sole reality: sensible forms are an image of them impressed on matter through the agency of the world-soul. But *Nous*, or the totality of Ideas, though high, is not the highest. All that has hitherto occupied us, Nature, Soul, and Reason, is pervaded by a fundamental unity, without which nothing could exist. But Soul is not herself this unity, nor is Reason. Self-consciousness, even in its purest expression, involves a duality of object and subject. The notion of Being is distinct from the notion of oneness. The principle represented by the latter as the cause of all things must itself transcend existence. At the same time, it is revealed to us by the fact of our own personal identity. To be united with oneself is to be united with the One.

Thus we have, in all, five gradations: the One, *Nous*, Soul, the sensible world, and, lastly, unformed Matter. Taken together, the first three constitute a triad of spiritual principles, and, as such, are associated in a single group by Plotinus.¹ Sometimes they are spoken of as the Alexandrian Trinity. But the implied comparison with the Trinity of Catholicism is misleading. With Neo-Platonism, the supreme unity is, properly speaking, alone God and alone One. *Nous* is vastly inferior to the first principle, and Soul, again, to *Nous*. Possibly the second and third principles are personal; the first most certainly is not, since self-consciousness is expressly denied to it

¹ *Enn.*, v., i.

by Plotinus. Nor is it likely that the idea of a supernatural triad was suggested to Neo-Platonism by Christianity. Each of the three principles may be traced to its source in Greek philosophy. This has been already shown in the case of the One and of the Nous. The universal soul is to be found in Plato's *Timæus*; it is analogous, at least in its lower, divided part, to Aristotle's nature; and it is nearly identical with the informing spirit of Stoicism. As to the number three, it was held in high esteem long before the Christian era, and was likely to be independently employed for the construction of different systems at a time when belief in the magical virtue of particular numbers was more widely diffused than at any former period of civilised history.

From another point of view, as I have already observed with Kirchner, the fundamental triad assumed by Plotinus is body, soul, and spirit. Under their objective aspect of the sensible universe, the world-soul, and the Nous, these three principles constitute the sum of all reality. Take away plurality from Nous and there remains the One. Take away soul from body and there remains unformed matter. These are the two transcendent principles between which the others extend, and by whose combination in various proportions they are explained. Plotinus himself does not allude to the possibility of such an analysis, but it exhibits, better than any other, the natural order of his dialectic.

Plotinus passes by an almost insensible transition from the more elementary and analytical to the more constructive portion of his philosophy. This naturally falls into two great divisions, the one speculative and the other practical. It has to be shown by what necessity and in what order the great cosmic principles are evolved from their supreme source; and it has also to be shown in what way this knowledge is connected with the supreme interests of the human soul. The moral aspect of Neo-Platonism is not at first very clearly distinguished from its metaphysical aspect; and both find their most general solution in the same line of thought that has led us up to a contemplation of the ultimate One. For the successive gradations of our ascent represent, in an inverted order, the steps of creative energy by which all things are evolved from their primal source; while they directly correspond to the process of purification through which every soul must pass in returning from the exile of her separate and material existence to the happiness of identification with God. And here we at once come on the fundamental contradiction of the system. What we were so carefully taught to consider as one and nothing more, must now be conceived as the first cause and the supreme good. Plotinus does, indeed, try to evade the difficulty by saying that his absolute is only a

cause in relation to other things, that it is not so much good as the giver of good, that it is only one in the sense of not being many.¹ But after making these reservations, he continues to use the old terms as confidently as if they stood for the ideas usually associated with them. His fundamental error was to identify three distinct methods of connecting phenomena, in thought, with each other or with ourselves. We may view things in relation to their generating antecedents, in relation to other things with which they are associated by resemblance or juxtaposition, or in relation to the satisfaction of our own wants. These three modes of reference correspond to Aristotle's efficient, formal, and final causes; but the word causation should be applied only to the first. Whether their unfortunate confusion both by Aristotle and by his successors was in any appreciable degree due to their having been associated by him under a common denomination, may reasonably be doubted. It is rather more probable that the same name was given to these different conceptions in consequence of their having first become partially identified in thought. Social arrangements, which have a great deal to do with primitive speculation, would naturally lead to such an identification. The king or other chief magistrate stands at the head of the social hierarchy and forms the bond of union among its members; he is the source of all authority; and his position, or, failing that, his favour, is regarded as the supreme good. Religion extends the same combination of attributes to her chief God; and philosophy, following on the lines of religion, employs it to unify the methods of science and morality.

All existence, according to Plotinus, proceeds from the One which he also calls God. But God does not create the world by a conscious exercise of power; for, as we have seen, every form of consciousness is excluded from his definition. Neither does it proceed from him by emanation, for this would imply a diminution of his substance.² It is produced by an overflow of his infinite power.³ Our philosopher tries to explain and defend this rather unintelligible mode of derivation by the analogy of physical substances and their actions. Light is constantly coming from the sun without any loss to the luminary itself.⁴ And all things are, in like manner, constantly communicating their proper virtue to others while remaining unaltered themselves. Here we have a good example of the close connexion between science and abstract speculation. People often talk as if metaphysics was something beyond the reach of verification.

¹ *Enn.*, vi., 9, 3, *sub fin.*; *ibid.*, 6, p. 764, E (Kirchh., i., p. 87, l. 16) *Enn.* v., 5, 6, p. 525, D (Kirchh., ii., p. 24, l. 24).

² *Enn.*, vi., 9, 9, *sub in.*

³ *Ibid.*, v., 2, 1, p. 494, A (Kirchh., i., p. 109, l. 7).

⁴ *Ibid.*, v., 1, 5, p. 487, C (Kirchh., i., p. 101, l. 32).

But some metaphysical theories admit, at any rate, of disproof, in so far as they are founded on false physical theories. Had Plotinus known that neither the sun nor anything else in nature can produce energy out of nothing, he would, very probably, have hesitated to credit the One with such a power.

In reasoning up from the world to its first cause, we were given to understand that the two were related to one another as contradictory opposites. The multiple must proceed from the simple, and existence from that which does not exist. But the analogies of material production now suggest a somewhat different view. What every power calls into existence is an image of itself, but the effect is never more than a weakened and imperfect copy of its original. Thus the universe appears as a series of diminishing energies descending in a graduated scale from the highest to the lowest. Here, again, bad science makes bad philosophy. Effects are never inferior to their causes, but always exactly equal, the effect being nothing else than the cause in another place or under another form. This would be obvious enough, did not superficial observation habitually confound the real cause with the sum of its concomitants. What we are accustomed to think of as a single cause is, in truth, a whole bundle of causes, which do not always converge to a single point, and each of which, taken singly, is, of course, inferior to the whole sum taken together. Thus when we say that the sun heats the earth, this is only a conventional way of speaking. What really does the work is a relatively infinitesimal part of the solar heat separately transmitted to us through space. Once neglect this truth, and there is no reason why effects should not exceed as well as fall short of their causes in any assignable proportion. Such an illusion is, in fact, produced when different energies converge to a point. Here it is the consequent and not the antecedent which is confounded with the sum of its concomitants, as when an explosion is said to be the effect of a spark.

Of course I am speaking of causation as exercised under the conditions of time, space, matter, and motion. It is then identical with the transmission of energy and obeys the laws of energy. And to talk about causation under any other conditions than these is utter nonsense. But Plotinus and other philosophers exclude the most essential of the conditions specified from their enquiries into the ultimate origin of things. We are expressly informed that the genesis of *Nous* from the One, and of Soul from *Nous*, must not be conceived as taking place in time but in eternity.¹ Unfortunately those who make such reservations are not consistent. They continue to talk about power, causation, priority, and so forth, as if these conceptions were separable

¹ *Enn.*, v., 1, 6, p. 487, B (Kirchh., i, p. 101, l. 21).

from time. Hence they have to choose between making statements which are absolutely unintelligible and making statements which are absolutely untrue.

Perhaps the processes of logic and mathematics may be adduced as an exception. It may be contended that the genus is prior to the species, the premise to the conclusion, the unit to the multiple, the line to the figure, in reason though not in time. And Plotinus avails himself to the fullest extent of mathematical and logical analogies in his transcendental constructions. His One is the starting-point of numeration, the centre of a circle, the identity involved in difference; and under each relation it claims an absolute priority, of which causal power is only the most general expression. We have already seen how a multitude of archetypal Ideas spring from the supreme Nous as from their fountain-head. Their production is explained, on the lines of Plato's *Sophistês*, as a process of dialectical derivation. By logically analysing the conception of self-consciousness, we obtain, first of all, Nous itself, or Reason, as the subject, and Existence as the object of thought. Subject and object, considered as the same with one another, give us Identity; considered as distinct, they give us Difference. The passage from one to the other gives Motion; the limitation of thought to itself gives Rest. The plurality of determinations so obtained gives number and quantity, their specific difference gives quality, and from these principles everything else is derived.¹ It might seem as if, here at least, we had something which could be called a process of eternal generation—a causal order independent of time. But, in reality, the assumed sequence exists only in our minds, and there it takes place under the form of time, not less inevitably than do the external re-arrangements of matter and motion. Thus in logic and mathematics, such terms as priority, antecedence, and evolution can only be used to signify the order in which our knowledge is acquired; they do not answer to causal relations existing among things in themselves. And apart from these two orders—the objective order of dynamical production in space and time, and the subjective order of intelligibility in thought—there is no kind of succession that we can conceive. Eternal relations, if they exist at all, must be relations of co-existence, of resemblance, or of difference, continued through infinite time. Wherever there is antecedence, the consequent can only have existed for a finite time.

Some may think that this point has been pushed at unnecessary length. But the Neo-Platonic method is not quite so obsolete as they, perhaps, suppose. Whenever we repeat the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, we are expressing our religious belief in the language of the Alexandrian schools, thus pledging

¹ *Enn.*, v., 1, 4, p. 485, E (Kirchh., i., pp. 99 sqq.).

ourselves to metaphysical dogmas which we can neither explain nor defend. Such terms as sonship and procession have no meaning except when applied to relations conceived under the form of time; and to predicate eternity of them is to reduce them to so much unintelligible jargon.

An energy continually advancing through successive gradations, and diminishing as it advances—such, as we have seen, is the conception of existence offered by Plotinus. We have seen, also, how to explain the genesis of one principle from another without the aid of supernatural volition or of mechanical causation, he is compelled to press into the service every sort of relationship by which two objects can be connected, and to invest it with a dynamical significance which only the phenomena of matter and motion can possess. But what he chiefly relies on for guidance in this tortuous labyrinth of timeless evolution, is the old Greek principle that contraries are generated from one another. And with him, as with the earlier thinkers, all contraries reduce themselves, in the last analysis, to the four great antitheses of the One and the Many, Being and not-Being, the Same and the Other, Rest and Motion. It matters nothing that he should have followed Plato to the extent of co-ordinating five of these terms as supreme archetypal Ideas, immediately resulting from the self-consciousness of Nous, and themselves producing all other forms of existence. They are used, quite independently of Platonism, to explain the connexion of the various creative principles with one another. Nous is deduced from its first cause as Being from not-Being, as the Many from the One, as Difference from Identity, and as Motion from Rest.¹ To explain the generation of Soul from Nous is a more difficult problem. The One had originally been defined as the antithetical cause of Nous, and therefore the latter could easily be accounted for by simply reversing the analytical process; whereas Nous had not been defined as the cause of Soul, but as the model whence her creative Ideas are derived. Soul, in fact, is not opposed to anything; she is the connecting link between sense and spirit. In this strait, Plotinus seems to think that the antithesis between Rest and Motion is the best fitted to express the nature of her descent from the higher principle; and on one occasion he illustrates the relation of his three divine substances to one another by the famous figure of a central point representing the One, a fixed circle round that point representing the Nous, and outside that, again, a revolving circle representing the Soul.² Still, the different parts of the system are very awkwardly pieced together at this juncture; for the creative energy of the Nous has already been invoked to

¹ *Enn.*, v., 2, 1, p. 494, A; vi., 9, 2, p. 759, A; ii., 4, 5, p. 162, A.

² *Enn.*, iv., 4, 16, p. 409, C (Kirchh., i., p. 283, l. 31).

account for the Ideas or partial intelligences into which it spontaneously divides; and one does not understand how it can be simultaneously applied to the production of something that is not an Idea at all.

Fresh difficulties arise in explaining the activity which the Soul, in her turn, exerts. As originally conceived, her function was sufficiently clear. Mediating between two worlds, she transforms the lower one into a likeness of the higher, stamping on material objects a visible image of the eternal Ideas revealed to her by a contemplation of the Nous. And, as a further elaboration of this scheme, we were told that the primary soul generates an inferior soul, which, again, subdivides itself into the multitude of partial souls required for the animation of different bodily organisms. But now that our philosopher has entered on a synthetic construction of the elements furnished by his preliminary analysis, he finds himself confronted by an entirely new problem. For his implied principle is that each hypostasis must generate the grade which comes next after it in the descending series of manifestations, until the possibilities of existence have been exhausted. But in developing and applying the noetic Ideas, the Soul, apparently, finds a pre-existing Matter ready to hand. Thus she has to deal with something lower than herself, which she did not create, and which is not created by the Forms combined with it in sensible experience. We hear of a descent from thought to feeling, and from feeling to simple vitality,¹ but in each instance the depth of the Soul's fall is measured by the extent to which she penetrates into the recesses of a substance not clearly related to her nor to anything above her.

Plotinus is driven by this perplexity to reconsider the whole theory of Matter.² He takes Aristotle's doctrine as the groundwork of his investigation. According to this, all existence is divided into Matter and Form. What we know of things—in other words, the sum of their differential characteristics—is their Form. Take away this, and the unknowable residuum is their Matter. Again, Matter is the vague indeterminate something out of which particular Forms are developed. The two are related as Possibility to Actuality, as the more generic to the more specific substance through every grade of classification and composition. Thus there are two Matters, the one sensible and the other intelligible. The former constitutes the common substratum of bodies, the other the common element of ideas.³ The general distinction between Matter and Form was originally suggested to Aristotle by Plato's remarks on the same subject; but he differs from his master in two important particulars.

¹ *Enn.*, v., 2, 2.

² *Enn.*, ii., 4.

³ Aristot., *Metaph.*, vii., 10, *sub fin.*

Plato, in his *Timaeus*, seems to identify Matter with space.¹ So far, it is a much more positive conception than the ὕλη of the *Metaphysics*. On the other hand, he constantly opposes it to reality as something non-existent; and he at least implies that it is opposed to absolute good as a principle of absolute evil.² Thus while the Aristotelian world is formed by the development of Power into Actuality, the Platonic world is composed by the union of Being and not-Being, of the Same and the Different, of the One and the Many, of the Limit and the Unlimited, of Good and Evil, in varying proportions with each other.

Plotinus, as I have said, starts with the Aristotelian account of Matter; but by a process of dialectical manipulation, he gradually brings it into almost complete agreement with Plato's conception; thus, as usual, mediating between and combining the views of his two great authorities. In the first place, he takes advantage of Aristotle's distinction between intelligible and sensible Matter, to strip the latter of that positive and vital significance with which it had been clothed in the Peripatetic system. In the world of Ideas, there is an element common to all specific forms, a fundamental unity in which they meet and inhere, which may without impropriety be called their Matter. But this Matter is an eternal and divine substance, inseparably united with the fixed forms which it supports, and therefore something which, equally with them, receives light and life and thought from the central source of being. It is otherwise with sensible Matter, the common substance of the corporeal elements. This is, to use the energetic expression of our philosopher, a decorated corpse.³ It does not remain constantly combined with any form, but is for ever passing from one to another, without manifesting a particular preference for any. As such, it is the absolute negation of Form, and can only be conceived, if at all, by thinking away every sensible quality. Neither has it any quantity, for quantity means magnitude, and magnitude implies definite figure. Aristotle opposed to each particular form a corresponding privation, and placed Matter midway between them. Plotinus, on the other hand, identifies Matter with the general privation of all forms. It is at this point that he begins to work his way back to the Platonic notion of Matter as simple extension. There must, after all, be something about Matter which enables it to receive every kind of quality and figure,—it must have some sort of mass or bulk, not, indeed, in any definite sense, but with an equal capacity for expansion and for contraction. Now, says Plotinus, the very indeterminateness of Matter is precisely the capacity for extension in all directions that we require. 'Having no

¹ *Tim.*, 48, E *sqq.*

² *Ibid.*, 47, E.

³ *Enn.*, ii., 4, 5, p. 161, E (Kirchh., i., p. 114, l. 1).

principle of stability, but being borne towards every form, and easily led about in all directions, it acquires the nature of a mass.¹

Henceforth, whatever our philosopher says about Matter will apply to extension and to extension alone. It cannot be apprehended by sight, nor by hearing, nor by smell, nor by taste, for it is neither colour, nor sound, nor odour, nor sapid juice. Neither can it be touched, for it is not a body, but it becomes corporeal on being blended with sensible qualities. And, in a later essay, he describes it as receiving all things and letting them depart again without retaining the slightest trace of their presence.² Why then, it may be asked, if Plotinus meant extension, could he not say so at once, and save us all this trouble in hunting out his meaning? There were very good reasons why he should not. In the first place, he wished to express himself, so far as possible, in Aristotelian phraseology; and this was incompatible with the reduction of Matter to extension. In the next place, the idea of an infinite void had been already appropriated by the Epicureans, to whose system he was bitterly opposed. And, finally, the extension of ordinary experience had not the absolute generality which was needed in order to bring Matter into relation with that ultimate abstraction whence, like everything else, it has now to be derived.

As a result of the preceding analysis, Plotinus at last identifies Matter with the Infinite—not an infinite something, but the Infinite pure and simple, apart from any subject of which it can be predicated. We started with what seemed a broad distinction between intelligible and sensible Matter. That distinction now disappears in a new and more comprehensive conception; and, at the same time, Plotinus begins to see his way towards a restatement of his whole system in clearer terms. 'The Infinite is generated from the infinity or power or eternity of the One; not that there is infinity in the One, but that it is created by the One.'³ With the first outrush of energy from the primal fount of things, Matter begins to exist. But no sooner do movement and difference start into life, than they are restrained and bent back by the presence of the One; and this reflection of power or being on itself constitutes the supreme self-consciousness of Nous.⁴ Whether the subsequent creation of Soul involves a fresh production of energy, or whether a portion of the original stream that was called into existence by the One, escapes from the restraining self-consciousness of Nous and continues its onward flow—this Plotinus does not say. What he does say is

¹ *Enn.*, ii., 4, 11, *sub fin.*

² *Enn.*, iii., 6, 14 *sq.*

³ *Enn.*, ii., 4, 15, p. 169, A (Kirchh., i., p. 124, l. 17).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5, p. 162, A (Kirchh., i., p. 114, l. 12).

that Soul stands to Nous in the relation of Matter to Form, and is raised to perfection by gazing back on the Ideas contained in Nous, just as Nous itself had been perfected by returning to the One.¹ But while the two higher principles remain stationary, the Soul, besides giving birth to a fresh stream of energy, turns towards her own creation and away from the fountain of her life. And, apparently, it is only by this condescension on her part that the visible world could have been formed.² We can explain this by supposing that as the stream of Matter departs more and more from the One, its power of self-reflection continually diminishes, and at length ceases altogether. It is thus that the substratum of sensible objects must, as we have seen, be conceived under the aspect of a passive recipient for the forms imposed on it by the Soul; and just as those forms are a mere image of the noetic Ideas, so also, Plotinus tells us, is their Matter an image of that intelligible Matter which exists in the Nous itself; only the image realises the conception of a material principle more completely than the archetype, because of its more negative and indeterminate nature, a diminution of good being equivalent to an increase of evil.³

Still Plotinus gives no clear answer to the question whence comes this last and lowest Matter. He will not say that it is an emanation from the Soul, nor yet will he say that it is a formless residue of the element out of which she was shaped by a return to the Nous. In truth, he could not make up his mind as to whether the Matter of sensible objects was created at all. He oscillates between unwillingness to admit that absolute evil can come from good, and unwillingness to admit that the two are co-ordinate principles of existence. And, as usual, where ideas fail him, he helps himself out of the difficulty with metaphors. The Soul must advance, and in order to advance she must make a place for herself, and that there may be a place there must be body. Or, again, while remaining fixed in herself, she sends out a great light, and by the light she sees that there is darkness beyond its extreme verge, and moulds its formless substance into shape.⁴

The ambiguities and uncertainties which Plotinus exhibits in theorising on the origin of Matter, are due not only to the conflicting influences of Plato and Aristotle, but also to another influence quite distinct from theirs. This is the Stoic Cosmology. While utterly repudiating the materialism of the Stoics,

¹ *Enn.*, iii., 9, 3, p. 358, A (Kirchh., i., p. 128, l. 22).

² *Enn.*, ii., 4, 15, p. 169, B (Kirchh., i., p. 124, l. 22).

³ *Enn.*, iii., 4, 1.

⁴ *Enn.*, iv., 3, 9, p. 379, A (Kirchh., i., p. 244, l. 17). In one of his latest essays (*Enn.*, i., 8, 7) Plotinus for a moment accepts the Platonic theory that evil must necessarily coexist with good as its correlative opposite, but quickly returns to the alternative theory that evil results from the gradual diminution and extinction of good (cp. Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, p. 549).

Plotinus evidently felt attracted by their severe monism, and by the consistent manner in which they derived every form of existence from the divine substance. They too recognised a distinction between Form and Matter, the active and the passive principle in nature, but they supposed that the one, besides being penetrated and moulded by the other, had also been originally produced by it. Such a theory was well suited to the energetic and practical character of Stoic morality, with its aversion from mere contemplation, its immediate bearing on the concrete interests of life. Man was conceived as an intelligent force, having for his proper function to bring order out of chaos, 'to make reason and the will of God prevail,' and this ideal appeared to be reflected in the dynamic constitution of nature. With Plotinus, on the other hand, as with Aristotle, theory and not practice was the end of life, or rather, as he himself expressed it, practice was an inferior kind of theorising, an endeavour to set before oneself in outward form what should properly be sought in the noetic world where subject and object are one.¹ Accordingly, while accepting the Stoic monism, he strove to bring it into close agreement with Aristotle's cosmology, by substituting contemplation for will as the creative principle in all existence, no less than as the ideal of happiness for man.

We have seen how, in accordance with this view, each principle is perfected by looking back on its source.² Thus the activity of the world-soul, so far as it is exercised for the benefit of what comes after and falls beneath her, is an anomaly only to be accounted for by her inferior place in the system of graduated descent; or else by the utter impotence of Matter, which is incapable of raising itself into Form by a spontaneous act of reflection, and can only passively receive the images transmitted to it from above, without being able to retain even these for any time. Nay, here also, what looks like creative energy admits of being assimilated more or less closely to an exercise of idealising thought. It is really for her own sake that the Soul fills what lies beyond her with life and light, not, like Plato's Soul, from pure disinterested joy in the communication and diffusion of good. It is because she recoils with horror from

¹ *Enn.*, iii., 8, 4 and 8.

² Our own word 'paragon' is a curious record of the theory in question. It is derived from the Greek participial substantive *ὁ παράγων*, the producer. Now, according to Neo-Platonism, in the hierarchic series of existences, the product always strives, or should strive, to model itself on the producer, hence *παράγων* came to be used in the double sense of a cause and an exemplar. As such, it is one of the technical terms employed throughout the *Institutio Theologica* of Proclus (see in particular cap. xxvii.). But, in time, the second or derivative meaning became so much the more important as to gain exclusive possession of the word on its adoption into modern languages. [I find that this etymology is not recognised by the *New English Dictionary*; but I continue to adhere to it (1914).]

darkness and nonentity that she shapes the formless substance into a residence for herself, on the model of 'the imperial palace whence she came.' Thus the functions of sensation, nutrition, and reproduction are to be regarded as so many modes of contemplation. In the first, the Soul dwells on the material images which already exist; in the second and third, she strives to perpetuate and multiply them still further. And the danger is that she may become so enthralled by her own creation as to forget the divine original after which it is formed.¹ Should she yield to the snare, successive transmigrations will sink her lower and lower into the depths of animalism and material darkness. To avoid this degradation, to energise with the better part of our nature, is to be good. And with the distinction between good and evil, we pass from the metaphysical to the ethical portion of the system.

VIII

All virtue, with Plotinus, rests on the superiority of the soul to the body. So far, he follows the common doctrine of Plato and Aristotle. But in working out the distinction, he is influenced by the individualising and theoretic philosophy of the second rather than by the social and practical philosophy of the first. Or, again, we may say that with him the intellectualism of Aristotle is heightened and warmed by the religious aspirations of Plato, strengthened and purified by the Stoic passionlessness, the Stoic independence of external goods. In his ethical system, the virtues are arranged in an ascending scale. Each grade reproduces the old quadripartite division into Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, and Justice, but in each their respective significance receives a new interpretation. As civic virtues, they continue to bear the meaning assigned to them in Plato's *Republic*. Wisdom belongs to reason, Courage to passionate spirit, Temperance to desire, while Justice implies the fulfilment of its appropriate function by each.² But all this only amounts to the restriction of what would otherwise be unregulated impulse, the imposition of Form on Matter, the supremacy of the soul over the body; whereas what we want is to get rid of matter altogether. Here also, Plato sets us on the right track when he calls the virtues purifications. From this point of view, for the soul to energise alone without any interference, is Wisdom; not to be moved by the passions of the body is Temperance; not to dread separation from the body is Courage; and to obey the guidance of reason is Justice.³ Such a disposition of the soul is what Plato means by flying from the world and becoming like God. Is this enough? No, it is not.

¹ *Enn.*, iii., 4, 2.

² *Enn.*, i., 2, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

We have, so far, been dealing only with the negative conditions of good, not with good itself. The essential thing is not purification, but what remains behind when the work of purification is accomplished. So we come to the third and highest grade of virtue, the truly divine life, which is a complete conversion to reason. Our philosopher endeavours to fit this also into the framework of the cardinal virtues, but not without imposing a serious strain on the ordinary meaning of words. Of Wisdom nothing need be said, for it is the same as rationality. Justice is the self-possession of mind, Temperance the inward direction towards reason, Courage the impassivity arising from resemblance to that which is by nature impassive.¹

Plotinus is careful to make us understand that his morality has neither an ascetic nor a suicidal tendency. Pleasures are to be tolerated under the form of a necessary relief and relaxation; pains are to be removed, but if incurable, they are to be patiently borne; anger is, if possible, to be suppressed, and, at any rate, not allowed to exceed the limits of an involuntary movement; fear will not be felt except as a salutary warning. The bodily appetites will be restricted to natural wants, and will not be felt by the soul, except, perhaps, as a transient excitement of the imagination.² Whatever abstinences our philosopher may have practised on his own account, we find no trace of a tendency towards self-mortification in his writings, nothing that is not consistent with the healthiest traditions of Greek spiritualism as originally constituted by the great Athenian school.

While not absolutely condemning suicide, Plotinus restricts the right of leaving this world within much narrower limits than were assigned to it by the Stoics. In violently separating herself from the body, the soul, he tells us, is acting under the influence of some evil passion, and he intimates that the mischievous effects of this passion will prolong themselves into the new life on which she is destined to enter.³ Translated into more abstract language, his meaning probably is that the feelings which ordinarily prompt to suicide, are such as would not exist in a well-regulated mind. It is remarkable that Schopenhauer, whose views of life were, on other points, the very reverse of those held by Plotinus, should have used very much the same argument against self-destruction. According to his theory the lifeward will which it should be our principal business to conquer, asserts itself strongly in the wish to escape from suffering, and only delays the final moment of peaceful extinction by rushing from one phase of existence to another. And in order to prove the possibility of such a revival, Schopenhauer was obliged to graft on his philosophy a theory of metempsychosis, which, but for this necessity, would certainly never have

¹ *Enn.*, i., 2, 6, *sub fin.*

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

found a place in it at all. In this, as in many other instances, an ethical doctrine is apparently deduced from a metaphysical doctrine which has, in reality, been manufactured for its support. All systems do but present under different formulas a common fund of social sentiment. A constantly growing body of public opinion teaches us that we do not belong to ourselves, but to those about us, and that, in ordinary circumstances, it is no less weak and selfish to run away from life than to run away from death.

Plotinus follows up his essay on the Virtues by an essay on Dialectic.¹ As a method for attaining perfection, he places dialectic above ethics; and, granting that the apprehension of abstract ideas ranks higher than the performance of social duties, he is quite consistent in so doing. Not much, however, can be made of his few remarks on the subject. They seem to be partly meant for a protest against the Stoic idea that logic is an instrument for acquiring truth rather than truth itself, and also against the Stoic use or abuse of the syllogistic method. In modern phraseology, Plotinus seems to view dialectic as the immanent and eternal process of life itself, rather than as a collection of rules for drawing correct inferences from true propositions, or from propositions assumed to be true. We have seen how he regarded existence in the highest sense as identical with the self-thinking of the absolute Nous, and how he attempted to evolve the whole series of archetypal Ideas contained therein from the simple fact of self-consciousness. Thus he would naturally identify dialectic with the subjective reproduction of this objective evolution; and here he would always have before his eyes the splendid programme sketched in Plato's *Republic*.² His preference of intuitive to discursive reasoning has been quoted by Ritter as a symptom of mysticism. But here, as in so many instances, he follows Aristotle, who also held that simple abstraction is a higher operation, and represents a higher order of real existence than complex ratiocination.³

The ultimate stage of perfection is, of course, the identification of subject and object, the ascent from the Nous to the One. But, on this point, Plotinus never added anything essential to what has already been quoted from the analytical portion of his enquiry, and the essay containing that passage is accordingly placed last in Porphyry's arrangement of his works.

The foregoing account of Neo-Platonism has, with the exception of a few illustrations, been derived exclusively from the earlier essays of Plotinus. His subsequent writings are exceedingly obscure and tedious, and they add little by way either of development or defence to the outlines which he had

¹ *Enn.*, i., 3.

² *Rep.*, vi., 511.

³ See the conclusion of the *Posterior Analytics*.

sketched with a master's hand. Whatever materials they may supply for a better appreciation, whether of his philosophy or of his general character as a thinker, will most profitably find their place in the final survey of both which I shall now attempt to give.

IX

Every great system of philosophy may be considered from four distinct points of view. We may ask what is its value as a theory of the world and of human life, measured either by the number of new truths that it contains, or by the stimulus to new thought that it affords. Or we may consider it from the aesthetic side, as a monumental structure interesting us not by its utility, but by its beauty and grandeur. Under this aspect, a system may be admirable for its completeness, coherence, and symmetry, or for the great intellectual qualities exhibited by its architect, although it may be open to fatal objections as a habitation for human beings, and may fail to reproduce the plan on which we now know that the universe is built. Or, again, our interest in the work may be purely historical and psychological; we may look on it as the product of a particular age and a particular mind, as summing up for us under their most abstract form the ideas and aspirations which at any given moment had gained possession of educated opinion. Or, finally, we may study it as a link in the evolution of thought, as a result of earlier tendencies, and an antecedent of later developments. I propose to make a few remarks on the philosophy of Plotinus, or, what is the same thing, on Neo-Platonism in general, from each of these four points of view.

In absolute value, Neo-Platonism stands lowest as well as last among the ancient schools of thought. No reader who has accompanied me thus far will need to be reminded how many valuable ideas were first brought to light, or reinforced with new arguments and illustrations by the early Greek thinkers, by the Sophists and Socrates, by Plato and Aristotle, by the Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics, and by the moralists of the Roman empire. On every subject of speculation that can be started, we continue to ask, like Plotinus himself, what the 'blessed ancients' had to say about it;¹ not, of course, because they lived a long time ago, but because they came first, because they said what they had to say with the unique charm of original discovery, because they were in more direct contact than we are, not, indeed, with the facts, but with the phenomena of nature, of life, and of thought. It is true that we have nothing more to learn from them, for whatever was sound in

¹ *Enn.*, iii., 7, 1, p. 325, C (Kirchh., ii., p. 282, l. 13).

their teaching has been entirely absorbed into modern thought, and combined with ideas of which they did not dream. But until we come to Hume and his successors, there is nothing in philosophical literature that can be compared to their writings for emancipating and stimulating power; and, perhaps, when the thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have become as obsolete as Bacon and Descartes are now, those writings will continue to be studied with unabating zeal. Neo-Platonism, on the other hand, is dead, and every attempt made to galvanise it into new life has proved a disastrous failure. The world, that is to say the world of culture, will not read Plotinus and his successors, will not even read the books that are written about them by scholars of brilliant literary ability like Vacherot and Jules Simon in France, Steinhart and Kirchner in Germany.¹

We have not far to seek for the cause of this fatal condemnation. Neo-Platonism is nothing if not a system, and as a system it is false, and not only false but out of relation to every accepted belief. In combining the dialectic of Plato with the metaphysics of Aristotle and the physics of Stoicism, Plotinus has contrived to rob each of whatever plausibility it once possessed. The Platonic doctrine of Ideas was an attempt to express something very real and important, the distinction between laws and facts in nature, between general principles and particular observations in science, between ethical standards and everyday practice in life. The eternal *Nous* of Aristotle represented the upward struggle of nature through mechanical, chemical, and vital movements to self-conscious thought. The world-soul of Stoicism represented a return to monism, a protest against the unphilosophical antithesis between God and the world, spirit and matter, necessity and free-will. Plotinus attempts to rationalise the Ideas by shutting them up in the Aristotelian *Nous*, with the effect of severing them still more hopelessly from the real world, and, at the same time, making their subjective origin still more flagrantly apparent than before. And along with the Stoic conception of a world-soul, he preserves all those superstitious fancies about secret spiritual sympathies and affinities connecting the different parts of nature with one another which the conception of a transcendent *Nous*,

¹ Zeller's last volume, giving a full account of the Neo-Platonic school, has reached a third edition, but it belongs to a connected work, and contains, in addition, a mass of information possessing special interest for theologians. It has not, however, been translated into English, nor apparently is there any intention of translating it. Mr. Whittaker's able and learned work *The Neo-Platonists* (1901) claims a higher value as regards positive content of true ideas for the whole school, and particularly for Proclus, than I am prepared to admit. The fashionable mysticism of the present day may do something, as a similar movement did a century ago, to stimulate a limited interest in these writers; but I do not believe that it will be lasting.

as originally understood by Aristotle, had at least the merit of excluding. Finally, by a tremendous wrench of abstraction, the unity of existence is torn away from existence itself, and the most relative of all conceptions is put out of relation to the thought which, in the very same breath, it is declared to condition, and to the things which it is declared to create.

Again, on the practical side, by combining Plato with Aristotle and both with Stoicism, Plotinus contrives to eliminate what is most valuable in each. If, in the *Republic*, the Good was placed above all existence, this was only that we might transform existence into its image. If Aristotle placed the theoretical above the ethical virtues, he assigned no limits but those of observation and reasoning to the energising of theoretic power. If the Stoics rested morality on the absolute isolation of the human will, they deduced from this principle not only the inwardness of virtue, but also the individualisation of duty, the obligation of beneficence, and of the forgiveness of sin. But with Plotinus, Reason has no true object of contemplation outside its own abstract ideas, and the self-realisation of Stoicism means a barren consciousness of personal identity, from which every variety of interest and sympathy is excluded: it is not an expansion of our own soul into coincidence with the absolute All, but a concentration of both into a single point, a flight of the alone to the alone;¹ for only in this utter solitude does he admit that the Platonic Good is finally and wholly possessed.

Nor, with a single exception, is the fundamental untruth of the system redeemed by any just and original observations on points of detail such as lie so thickly scattered over the pages of other metaphysicians, both in ancient and modern literature. The single exception is the refutation of materialism to which attention has been already directed. Apart from this, the *Enneads* do not contain one single felicitous or suggestive idea, nothing that can enlarge the horizon of our thoughts, nothing that can exalt the purpose of our lives.

If, however, we pass to the second point of view, and judge Neo-Platonism according to the requirements, not of truth or of usefulness, but of beauty, our first verdict of utter condemnation will be succeeded by a much more favourable opinion. Plotinus has used the materials inherited from his predecessors with unquestionable boldness and skill; and the constructive power exhibited in the general plan of his vast system is fully equalled by the close reasoning with which every detail is elaborated and fitted into its proper place. Nothing can be imagined more imposing than this wondrous procession of

¹ *Enn.*, vi., 9, *sub fin.*

forms defiling from the Absolute One whither thought cannot soar to the abysmal infinitudes of possibility which thought cannot sound—from the self-developing consciousness of Reason as it breaks and flames and multiplies into a whole universe of being and life and thought, ever returning, by the very law of their production, to the source whence they have sprung—onward and outward on the wings of the cosmic Soul, through this visible world, where they reappear as images of intellectual beauty in the eternal revolutions of the starry spheres above, in the everlasting reproduction of organic species below, in the loveliest thoughts and actions of the loveliest human souls—till the utmost limits of their propagation and dispersion have been reached, till the last faint rays of existence die out in the dark and void region that extends to infinity beyond. Nothing in the realm of abstractions can be more moving than this Odyssey of the human soul, wakened by visions of earthly loveliness to a consciousness of her true destiny, a remembrance of her lost and forgotten home ; then abandoning these for the possession of a more spiritual beauty, ascending by the steps of dialectic to a contemplation of the archetypal Ideas that lie folded and mutually interpenetrated in the bosom of the eternal Reason where thought and being are but the double aspect of a single absolute reality ; seeking farther and higher, beyond the limits of existence itself, for a still purer unity, and finding in the awful solitude of that supreme elevation that the central source of all things does not lie without but within, that only in returning to self-identity does she return to the One ; or, again, descending to the last confines of light and life that she may prolong their radiation into the formless depths of matter, projecting on its darkness an image of the glory whose remembrance still attends her in her fall.

Still more impressive, if we consider the writings of Plotinus on their personal side, and as a revelation of their author's mind, is the high and sustained purity, the absolute detachment and disinterestedness by which they are characterised throughout. No trace of angry passion, no dallying with images of evil, interferes to mar their exalted spirituality from first to last. While the western world was passing through a period of horror and degradation such as had never been known before, the philosopher took refuge in an ideal sphere, and looked down on it all with no more disturbance to his serenity than if he had been the spectator of a mimic performance on the stage.¹ This, indeed, is one of the reasons

¹ *Enn.*, iii., 2, 15, p. 266, E (Kirchh., ii., p. 336, l. 31), Ernest Renan talks of the period from 235 to 284 as 'cet enfer d'un demi-siècle où sombre toute philosophie, toute civilité, toute délicatesse' (*Marc-Aurèle*, p. 498). As, however, this epoch produced Neo-Platonism, the expression 'toute philosophie' seems rather misplaced.

why the *Enneads* are so much less interesting, from a literary point of view, than the works of the Roman Stoics. It is not only that we fail to find in them any allusions even of the faintest kind to contemporary events or to contemporary life and manners, such as abound in Seneca and Epictetus, but there is not the slightest reference to the existence of such a thing as the Roman empire at all. One or two political illustrations occur, but they are drawn from old Greek city life, and were probably suggested by Plato or Aristotle.¹ But this tremendous blank is so perfectly in keeping with the whole spirit of Neo-Platonism as to heighten instead of lowering its aesthetic effect. In studying the philosophy of the preceding centuries, to whatever school it may belong, we have the image of death always before our eyes; and to fortify us against its terrors, we are continually called upon to remember the vanity of life. This is the protest of thought against the world, just as in Lucian and Sextus we hear the protest of the world against thought. At last the whole bitter strife comes to an end, the vision of sense passes away,

And leaves us with Plotinus and pure souls.²

Here we need no deliverance from troubles and indignities which are not felt; nor do we need to be prepared for death, knowing that we can never die. The world will no longer look askance at us, for we have ceased to concern ourselves about its reformation. No scepticism can shake our convictions; for we have discovered the secret of all knowledge through the consciousness of that which is eternal in ourselves. Thus the world of outward experience has dropped out of our thoughts, because thought has orb'd into a world of its own.

X

In the foregoing remarks we have already passed from the purely aesthetic to the historical or psychological view of Neo-Platonism—that is, the view which considers a philosophy in reference to the circumstances of its origin. Every speculative system reflects, more or less fully, the spirit of the age in which it was born; and the absence of all allusion to contemporary events does not prove that the system of Plotinus was an exception to this rule. It only proves that the tendency of the age was to carry away men's thoughts from practical to theoretical interests. I have already characterised

¹ *Enn.*, iv., 4, 17, p. 410, B (Kirchh., i., p. 285, l. 1).

² . . . restores us to the level of pure souls
And leaves us with Plotinus.—*Aurora Leigh*.

the first centuries of Roman imperialism as a period of ever-increasing religious reaction ; and in this reaction I attempted to distinguish between the development of supernaturalist beliefs which were native to Greece and Italy, and the importation of beliefs which had originated in the East. We saw also how philosophy shared in the general tendency, how it became theological and spiritualistic instead of ethical and naturalistic, how its professors were converted from opponents into upholders of the popular belief. Now, according to some critics, Neo-Platonism marks another stage in the gradual substitution of faith for reason, of authority for independent thought ; the only question being whether we should interpret it as a product of Oriental mysticism, or as a simple sequence of the same movement which had previously led from Cicero to Seneca, from Seneca to Epictêtus, from Epictêtus to Marcus Aurelius.

Of these views, the first is taken by Ritter, and adopted with some modifications by Vacherot in his *Histoire de l'Ecole d'Alexandrie*. It is also unreservedly accepted by Donaldson in his continuation of Müller's *History of Greek Literature*, and probably used to be held by most Englishmen who took any interest in the subject at all. The second view—according to which Neo-Platonism is, at least in its main features, a characteristic although degenerate product of Greek thought—is that maintained by Zeller. As against the Orientalising theory, it seems to me that Zeller has thoroughly proved his case.¹ It may be doubted whether there is a single idea in Plotinus which can be shown to have its exact counterpart in any of the Hindoo or other Asiatic systems whence he is supposed to have drawn ; and, as the preceding analysis has abundantly shown, he says nothing that cannot be derived, either directly or by a simple and easy process of evolution, from Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. On the other hand, has not Zeller gone much too far in treating Neo-Platonism as a product of the great religious reaction which unquestionably preceded and accompanied its appearance? Has he not altogether underrated its importance as a purely speculative system, an effort towards the attainment of absolute truth by the simple exercise of human reason? It seems to me that he has, and I shall offer some grounds for differing from his opinion.

To appreciate the labours of Plotinus, we must, first of all, compare his whole philosophic method with that of his predecessors. Now, Zeller himself has shown quite clearly that in reach of thought, in power of synthesis, in accuracy of reasoning, not one of these can be compared to the founder of

¹ *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii., 2, pp. 69 sqq., 419 sqq.

Neo-Platonism for a single moment.¹ We may go still further and declare with confidence that no philosopher of equal speculative genius had appeared in Hellas since Chrysippus, or, very possibly, since Aristotle. The only ground for disputing his claims to take rank with the great masters of Hellenic thought seems to be that his system culminates on the objective side in something which lies beyond existence, and on the subjective side in a mystical ecstasy which is the negation of reason. I have shown, however, that if the One is represented as transcending reality, so also is the Idea of Good which corresponds to it in Plato's scheme; and that the One is reached if not grasped by a process of reasoning which, although unsound, still offers itself as reasoning alone, and moves in complete independence of any revelation or intuition such as those to which the genuine systems of mysticism so freely resort.

It cannot be too often repeated that the One in no way conflicts with the world of real existence, but, on the contrary, creates and completes it. Now within that world, with which alone reason is properly concerned, Plotinus never betrays any want of confidence in its power to discover truth; nor, contrary to what Zeller assumes, does he seem to have been in the least affected by the efforts of the later Sceptics to invalidate its pretensions in this respect.² Their criticism was, in fact, chiefly directed against Stoicism, and did not touch the spiritualistic position at all. That there can be no certain knowledge afforded by sensation, or, speaking more generally, by the action of an outward object on an inward subject, Plotinus himself fully admits or rather contends.³ But while distrusting the ability of external perception, taken alone, to establish the existence of an external object by which it is caused, he expressly claims such a power for reason or understanding.⁴ For him, as for Aristotle, and probably for Plato also, the mind is one with its real object; in every act of cognition the idea becomes conscious of itself. I do not say that Scepticism is powerless against such a theory as this, but, in point of fact, it was a theory that the ancient Sceptics had not attacked, and their arguments no more led Plotinus to despair of reason than the similar arguments of Protagoras and Gorgias had led Plato and Aristotle to despair of it six centuries before. If Sextus and his school contributed anything to the great philosophical revolution of the succeeding age, it was by so weakening the materialistic systems as to

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 419 *sqq.*

² Zeller, p. 447.

³ *Enn.*, v., 5, p. 520, A (Kirchh., ii., p. 18, l. 3). This is the only passage in the *Enneads* where the Sceptics seem to be alluded to.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

render them less capable of opposing the spiritualistic revival when it came.

Unquestionably Plotinus was influenced by the supernaturalistic movement of his age, but only as Plato had been influenced by the similar reaction of his time; and just as the Athenian philosopher had protested against the superstitions which he saw gaining ground, so also did the Alexandrian philosopher protest, with far less vigour it is true, but still to some extent, against the worse extravagances universally entertained by his contemporaries. Among these, to judge by numerous references in his writings, astrology and magic held the foremost place. That there was something in both, he did not venture to deny, but he constantly endeavours to extenuate their practical significance and to give a more philosophical interpretation to the alleged phenomena on which they were based. Towards the old polytheism, his attitude, without being hostile, is perfectly independent. We can see this even in his life, notwithstanding the religious colouring thrown over it by Porphyry. When invited by his disciple Amelius to join in the public worship of the gods, he proudly answered, 'It is their business to come to me, not mine to go to them.'¹ In allegorising the old myths, he handles them with as much freedom as Bacon, and evidently with no more belief in their historical character.² In giving the name of God to his supreme principle, he is careful to exclude nearly every attribute associated with divinity even in the purest forms of contemporary theology. Personality, intelligence, will, and even existence, are expressly denied to the One. Although the first cause and highest good of all things, it is so not in a religious but in an abstract, metaphysical sense. The *Nous* with its ideal offspring and the world-soul are also spoken of as gods; but their personality, if they have any, is of the most shadowy description, and there is no reason for thinking that Plotinus ever worshipped them himself or intended them to be worshipped by his disciples. Like Aristotle, he attributes animation and divinity to the heavenly bodies, but with such careful provisions against an anthropomorphic conception of their nature, that not much devotional feeling is likely to have mingled with the contemplation of their splendour. Finally, we arrive at the daemons, those intermediate spirits that play so great a part in the religion of Plutarch and the other Platonists of the second century. With regard to these, Plotinus repeats many of the current opinions as if he shared them; but his adhesion is of an extremely tepid character; and

¹ *Vita*, x., *sub fin.*

² For specimens of his treatment, see Zeller, pp. 622 *sqq.*

it may be doubted whether the daemons meant much more for him than for Plato.¹

The immortality of the soul is a subject on which idealistic philosophers habitually express themselves in terms of apparently studied ambiguity, and this is especially true of Plotinus. Here, as elsewhere, he repeats the opinions and arguments of Plato, but with certain developments which make his adhesion to the popular belief in a personal duration after death considerably more doubtful than was that of his master. One great difficulty in the way of Plato's doctrine, as commonly understood, is that it attributes a permanence to individuals, which, on the principles of his system, should belong only to general ideas. Now, at first sight, Plotinus seems to evade this difficulty by admitting everlasting ideas of individuals no less than of generic types.² A closer examination, however, shows that this view is even more unfavourable than Plato's to the hope of personal immortality. For either our real self is independent of our empirical consciousness, which is just what we wish to have preserved, or, as seems more probable, the eternal existence which it enjoys is of an altogether ideal character, like that which Spinoza also attributed to the human soul, and which, in his philosophy, certainly had nothing to do with a prolongation of individual consciousness beyond the grave. As Madame de Staël observes of a similar view held at one time by Schelling, 'cette immortalité-là ressemble terriblement à la mort.' And when, in addition to his own theory of individual ideas, we find Plotinus adopting the theory of the Stoics, that the whole course of mundane affairs periodically returns to its starting-point and is repeated in the same order as before,³ we cannot help concluding that human immortality in the popular sense must have seemed as impossible to him as it did to them. We must, therefore, suppose that the doctrine of metempsychosis and future retributions which he unquestionably professes, applies only to certain determinate cycles of psychic life; or that it was to him, what it had probably been to Plato, only a figurative way of expressing the essential unity of all souls, and the transcendent character of ethical distinctions.⁴

In this connexion we may deal with the question whether the philosophy of Plotinus is properly described as a pantheistic system. Plotinus was certainly not a pantheist in the same sense as Spinoza and Hegel. With him, the One and the All

¹ For the theology of Plotinus see Zeller, pp. 617 *sqq.*, and for the daemons, p. 570. In my opinion, Zeller attributes a much stronger religious faith to Plotinus than can be proved from the passages to which he refers.

² *Enn.*, v., 7.

³ *Enn.*, v., 7, 1, p. 539, B (Kirchh., i., p. 145, l. 23).

⁴ For references, see Zeller, pp. 588 *sqq.*

are not identical; although impersonal and unconscious, his supreme principle is not immanent in the universe, but transcends and creates it: the totality of things are dependent on it, but it is independent of them. Even were we to assume that the One is only ideally distinct from the existence which it causes, still the *Nous* would remain separate from the world-soul, the higher Soul from nature, and, within the sphere of nature herself, Matter would continue to be perpetually breaking away from Form, free-will would be left in unreconciled hostility to fate. Once, and once only, if I remember rightly, does our philosopher rise to the modern conception of the universe as an absolute whole whose parts are not caused but constituted by their fundamental unity, and are not really separated from one another in nature, but only ideally distinguished in our thoughts. And he adds that we cannot keep up this effort of abstraction for long at a time; things escape from us, and return to their original unity.¹ With Plotinus himself, however, the contrary was true: what he could not keep up was his grasp on the synthetic unity of things. And he himself supplies us with a ready explanation why it should be so, when he points to the dividing tendency of thought as opposed to the uniting tendency of nature. What he and the other Hellenic thinkers wanted above all, was to make the world clear to themselves and to their pupils, and this they accomplished by their method of serial classification, by bringing into play what has often been spoken of in this work as the moments of antithesis, mediation, and circumscription. Stoicism also had just touched the pantheistic idea, only to let it go again. After being nominally identified with the world, the Stoic God was represented as a designing intelligence, like the Socratic God—an idea wholly alien from real pantheism.

If Plotinus rose above the vulgar superstitions of the West, while, at the same time, using their language for the easier expression of his philosophical ideas, there was one more refined superstition of mixed Greek and Oriental origin which he denounced with the most uncompromising vigour. This was Gnosticism, as taught by Valentinus and his school. Towards the close of our last chapter, some account was given of the theory in question. It was principally as enemies of the world and maligners of its perfection that the Gnostics made themselves offensive to the founder of Neo-Platonism. To him, the antithesis of good and evil was represented, not by the opposition of spirit and nature, but by the opposition between his ideal principle through all degrees of its perfection, and unformed Matter. Like Plato, he looked on the existing world as a consummate work of art, an embodiment of the archetypal Ideas,

¹ *Enn.*, vi., 2, 3, p. 598, A (Kirchh., ii., p. 227).

a visible presentation of reason. But in the course of his attack on the Gnostics,¹ other points of great interest are raised, showing how profoundly his philosophy differed from theirs, how entirely he takes his stand on the fixed principles of Hellenic thought. Thus he particularly reproaches his opponents for their systematic disparagement of Plato, to whom, after all, they owe whatever is true and valuable in their metaphysics.² He ridicules their belief in demoniacal possession, with its wholly gratuitous and clumsy employment of supernatural agencies to account for what can be sufficiently explained by the operation of natural causes.³ And, more than anything else, he severely censures their detachment of religion from morality. On this last point, some of his remarks are so striking and pertinent that they deserve to be quoted.

Above all, he exclaims, we must not fail to notice what effect this doctrine has on the minds of those whom they have persuaded to despise the world and all that it contains. Of the two chief methods for attaining the supreme good, one has sensual pleasure for its end, the other virtue, the effort after which begins and ends with God. Epicurus, by his denial of providence, leaves us no choice but to pursue the former. But this doctrine [Gnosticism], involving as it does a still more insolent denial of divine order and human law, laughs to scorn what has always been the accepted ideal of conduct, and, in its rage against beauty, abolishes temperance and justice—the justice that is associated with natural feeling and perpetuated by discipline and reason—along with every other ennobling virtue. So, in the absence of true morality, they are given over to pleasure and utility and selfish isolation from other men—unless, indeed, their nature is better than their principles. They have an ideal that nothing here below can satisfy, and so they put off the effort for its attainment to a future life, whereas they should begin at once, and prove that they are of divine race by fulfilling the duties of their present state. For virtue is the condition of every higher aspiration, and only to those who disdain sensual enjoyment is it given to understand the divine. How far our opponents are from realising this is proved by their total neglect of ethical science. They neither know what virtue is, nor how many virtues there are, nor what ancient philosophy has to teach us on the subject, nor what are the methods of moral training, nor how the soul is to be tended and cleansed. They tell us to look to God; but merely saying this is useless unless they can tell us what the manner of the looking is to be. For it might be asked, what is to prevent us from looking to God, while at the same time freely indulging our sensual appetites and angry passions. Virtue perfected, enlightened, and rooted in the soul, will reveal God to us, but without it he will remain an empty name.⁴

Even Vacherot, with all his anxiety to discover an Oriental

¹ *Enn.*, ii., 9.

² *Ibid.*, cap. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ *Enn.*, ii., 9, 15.

origin for Neo-Platonism, cannot help seeing that this attack on the Gnostics was inspired by an indignant reaction of Greek philosophy against the inroads of Oriental superstition, and that the same character belongs more or less to the whole system of its author. But, so far as I am aware, Kirchner is the only critic who has fully worked out this idea, and exhibited the philosophy of Plotinus in its true character as a part of the great classical revival, which after producing the literature of the second century reached its consummation in a return to the idealism of Plato and Aristotle.¹

Neo-Platonism may itself furnish us with no inapt image of the age in which it arose. Like the unformed Matter about which we have been hearing so much, the consciousness of that period was in itself dark, indeterminate and unsteady, uncreative, unspontaneous, unoriginating, but with a receptive capacity which enabled it to seize, reflect, and transmit the power of living Reason, the splendour of eternal thought.

XI

In fixing the relation of Plotinus to his own age, we have gone far towards fixing his relation to all ages, the place which he occupies in the development of philosophy as a connected whole. We have seen that as an attempt to discover the truth of things, his speculations are worthless and worse than worthless, since their method no less than their teaching is false. Nevertheless, Wisdom is justified of all her children. Without adding anything to the sum of positive knowledge, Plotinus produced an effect on men's thoughts not unworthy of the great intellect and pure life which he devoted to the service of philosophy. No other thinker has ever accomplished a revolution so immediate, so comprehensive, and of such prolonged duration. He was the creator of Neo-Platonism, and Neo-Platonism simply annihilated every school of philosophy to which it was opposed. For thirteen centuries or more, the three great systems which had so long divided the suffrages of educated minds—Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Scepticism—ceased to exist, and were allowed to lapse into such complete oblivion that only a few fragments of the works in which they were originally embodied have been preserved. And Plotinus was enabled to do this by the profound insight which led him to strike less at any particular doctrine held by his opponents than at the common foundation

¹ Kirchner, *Die Ph. d. Plot.*, pp. 1-24, 175-208. Cp. Steinhart, *Meletemata Plotiniana*, p. 4. (Since the first appearance of this work the Hellenic interpretation of Plotinus has been reinforced by the important adhesion of Mr. Whittaker in his *Neo-Platonists*.)

on which they all stood, the materialism openly professed by the Stoics and Epicureans, and assumed by the Sceptics as the necessary presupposition of every dogmatic philosophy. It is true that the principle which he opposed to theirs was not of his own origination, although he stated it more powerfully than it had ever been stated before. But to have revived the spiritualism of Plato and Aristotle in such a way as to win for it universal acceptance, was precisely his greatest merit. It is also the only one that he would have claimed for himself. As I have already mentioned, he professed to be nothing more than the disciple of Plato. And although Aristotelian ideas abound in his writings, still not only are they overbalanced by the Platonic element, but Plotinus might justly have contended that they also belong, in a sense, to Plato, having been originally acquired by a simple development from his teaching.

I have said that the founder of Neo-Platonism contrived to blend the systems of his two great authorities in such a manner as to eliminate much of the relative truth which is contained in each of them taken by itself. It has been reserved for modern thought to accomplish the profounder synthesis which has eliminated their errors in combining their truths. Yet, perhaps, no other system would have satisfied the want of the time so well as that constructed by Plotinus out of the materials at his disposal. Such as it was, that system held its ground as the reigning philosophy until all independent thinking was suppressed by Justinian, somewhat more than two and a half centuries after its author's death. Even then it did not become extinct, but reappeared in Christian literature, in the writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, and again in the daring speculations of Erigena, the father of mediaeval philosophy, to pass under more diluted forms into the teaching of the later Schoolmen, until the time arrived for its renewed study in the original sources as an element of the Platonic revival in the fifteenth century. All this popularity proves that Plotinus suited his own age and other ages that reproduced the same general intellectual tendencies. But the important thing was that he made Plato and Aristotle more interesting, and thus led men to study their writings more eagerly than before. The true reign of these philosophers does not begin until we reach the Middle Ages, and the commanding position which they then enjoyed was due in a great measure, to the revolution effected by Plotinus.

But when Neo-Platonism, as a literature and a system, had given way to the original authorities whence it was derived, its influence did not, on that account, cease to be

felt. In particular, Plotinus gave currency to a certain interpretation of Plato's teaching which has been universally accepted until a comparatively recent period, perhaps one may say until the time of Schleiermacher. We have seen how many elements of Platonism he left out of sight; and, thanks to his example, followed as it naturally was by Catholic theologians, the world was content to leave them out of sight as well. The charming disciple of Socrates whom we all know and love—the literary and dramatic artist, the brilliant parodist, the sceptical *raillieur* from the shafts of whose irony even his own theories are not safe, the penetrating observer of human life, the far-seeing critic and reformer of social institutions—is a discovery of modern scholarship. Not as such did the master of idealism appear to Marsilio Ficino and Michael Angelo, to Lady Jane Grey and Cudworth and Henry More, to Berkeley and Hume and Thomas Taylor, to all the great English poets from Spenser to Shelley; not as such does he now appear to popular imagination; but as a mystical enthusiast, a dreamer of dreams which, whether they be realised or not in some far-off sphere, are, at any rate, out of relation to the world of sensuous experience and everyday life. So absolute, indeed, is the reaction from this view that we are in danger of rushing to the contrary extreme, of forgetting what elements of truth the Plotinian interpretation contained, and substituting for it an interpretation still more one-sided, still more inadequate to express the scope and splendour of Plato's thoughts. Plato believed in truth and right and purity, believed in them still more profoundly than Plotinus; and his was a more effectual faith precisely because he did not share the sterile optimism of his Alexandrian disciple, but worked and watched for the realisation of what, as yet, had never been realised.¹

Finally, by the form which he gave to Platonism, Plotinus has had a large share in determining the direction of modern metaphysics. Although, as we have seen, not properly

¹ Two other popular misconceptions may be traced back, in part at least, to the exclusively transcendental interpretation of Plato's philosophy. By drawing away attention from the Socratic dialogues, it broke the connexion between Socrates and his chief disciple, thus leaving the former to be estimated exclusively from Xenophon's view of his character as a moral and religious teacher. True, Xenophon himself supplies us with the data which prove that Socrates was, above all things, a dialectician, but only in the reflex light of Plato's subsequent developments can their real significance be perceived. On the other hand, the attempt to combine Aristotle with Plato led to a serious misunderstanding of the actual relation between the two. When the whole ideal element of his philosophy had been drawn off and employed to heighten still further the transcendentalism of his master's teaching, the Stagirite came to be judged entirely by the residual elements, by the logical, physical, and critical portions of his system. On the strength of these, he was represented as the type of whatever is most opposed to Plato, and, in particular, of a practical, prosaic turn of mind, which was quite alien from his true character.

speaking a pantheist himself, he showed how the ideal theory could be transformed into a pantheistic system, and pantheism it immediately became when the peculiar limitations and subtleties of Greek thought had ceased to dominate over the western mind, and when the restraints of Catholic orthodoxy had been removed or relaxed. The stream of tendency in this direction runs all through the Middle Ages, and acquires new volume and momentum at the Renaissance, until it reaches its supreme expansion in the philosophy of Spinoza. Then, after a long pause, it is taken up by Kant's successors, and combined with the subjective idealism of modern psychology, finally passing, through the intervention of Victor Cousin and Sir William Hamilton, into the philosophy of Herbert Spencer.

The last-named thinker would, no doubt, have repudiated the title of pantheist; and it is certain that, under his treatment, pantheism has reverted, by a curious sort of atavism, to something much more nearly resembling the original doctrine of the Neo-Platonic school. Spencer tells us that the world is the manifestation of an unknowable Power. Plotinus said nearly the same, although not in such absolutely self-contradictory terms.¹ Spencer constantly assumes, by speaking of it in the singular number, that the creative Power of which we know nothing is one; having, apparently, convinced himself of its unity by two methods of reasoning. First, he identifies the transcendent cause of phenomena with the absolute, which is involved in our consciousness of relation; leaving it to be inferred that as relativity implies plurality, absoluteness must imply unity. And, secondly, from the mutual convertibility of the physical forces, he infers the unity of that which underlies force. Plotinus also arrives at the same result by two lines of argument, one *a posteriori*, and derived from the unity pervading all nature; the other *a priori*, and derived from the fancied dependence of the Many on the One. Even in his use of the predicate Unknowable without a subject, Mr. Spencer has been anticipated by Damascius, one of the last Neo-Platonists, who speaks of the supreme principle as τὸ ἄγνωστον.² And the same philosopher anticipates the late Father Dalgairns in suggesting the very pertinent question, how, if we know nothing about the Unknowable, we know that it is unknowable.

Nor is this all. Besides the arguments from relativity and causation, Spencer has a third method for arriving at his absolute. He thinks away all the determinations imposed by

¹ Χαλεπὸν μὲν γνωσθῆναι . . . γινωσκόμενον δὲ μᾶλλον τῷ ἂν αὐτοῦ γεννήματι τῇ οὐσίᾳ. (*Enn.*, vi., 9, 5, p. 763, B.) Πᾶν τὸ θεῖον αὐτὸ μὲν διὰ τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἔνωσιν ἄρρητόν ἐστι καὶ ἄγνωστον πᾶσι τοῖς δευτέροις ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν μετεχόντων ληπτὸν ἐστὶ καὶ γνωστόν. (Proclus, *Institutio Theologica*, cxiii.; cp. Proclus, *ibid.*, cxlii.)

² *De Princip.*, ii., quoted by Ritter and Preller, p. 564 sq.

consciousness on its objects and identifies the residual substance with the ultimate reality of things. Now this residue, as we have seen, exactly corresponds to the Matter, whether intelligible or sensible, of Aristotle and Plotinus. As such, it stands in extreme antithesis to the One,³ and yet there is a near kinship between them. Probably, according to Plotinus, and certainly according to Proclus,¹ Matter is a direct product of the One, whose infinite power it reflects. All existence is formed by the union, in varying proportions, of these two principles. Above all, both are unknowable. Thus it was natural that in the hands of less subtle analysts than the Greeks they should coalesce into a single substance. And, as a matter of fact, they have so coalesced in the systems of Giordano Bruno, of Spinoza, and finally of Spencer.

Here we imagine an impatient reader exclaiming, 'How could Herbert Spencer, who knew, if possible, even less of Greek philosophy than of his own Unknowable, have derived that principle from the Greeks?' Well, the genealogy by which the two systems of agnosticism are connected has already been traced. And some additional light will be thrown on the question if we consider that the form of Neo-Platonism was largely determined by the manner in which Plotinus brought the spiritualistic conceptualism of Plato and Aristotle into contact with the dynamic materialism of the Stoics; and that the form of Spencer's philosophy has been similarly determined by bringing the idealism of modern German thought into contact with the mechanical evolutionism of modern science. Thus, under the influence of old associations, has pantheism been metamorphosed into a crude agnosticism, which faithfully reproduces the likeness of its original ancestors, the Plotinian Matter and the Plotinian One.

XII²

The history of Neo-Platonism, subsequently to the death of Plotinus, decomposes itself into several distinct tendencies, pursuing more or less divergent lines of direction. First of all, it was drawn into the supernaturalist movement against which it had originally been, in part at least, a reaction and a protest. One sees from the life of its founder how far his two favourite disciples, Amelius and Porphyry, were from sharing his superiority to the superstitions of the age. Both had been educated under Pythagorean influences, which were fostered

¹ *Inst. Theol.*, lxxii., cp. Zeller, p. 808, where it is denied, wrongly, as I think, that Plotinus held the same view.

² The following sketch is based on the accounts given of the period to which it relates in the works of Zeller and Vacherot.

rather than repressed by the new philosophy. With Porphyry, theoretical interests are, to a great extent, superseded by practical interests; and, in practice, the religious and ascetic predominates over the purely ethical element. Still however great may have been his aberrations they never went beyond the limits of Hellenic tradition. Although of Syrian extraction, his attitude towards Oriental superstition was one of uncompromising hostility; and in writing against Christianity, his criticism of the Old Testament seems to have closely resembled that of modern rationalism. But with Porphyry's disciple, Iamblichus, every restraint is thrown aside, the wildest Oriental fancies are accepted as articles of belief, and the most senseless devotional practices are inculcated as means towards the attainment of a truly spiritual life.

Besides the general religious movement which had long been in action and was daily gaining strength from the increasing barbarisation of the empire there was, at this juncture, a particular cause tending to bring Greek philosophy into close alliance with the mythology which it had formerly rejected and denounced. This was the rapid rise and spread of Christianity. St. Augustine has said that of all heathen philosophers none came nearer to the Christian faith than the Neo-Platonists.¹ Nevertheless, it was in them that the old religion found its only apologists and the new religion its most active assailants. The elaborate polemic of Porphyry has been already mentioned. Half a century later, the same principles could boast of a still more illustrious champion. The emperor Julian was imbued with the doctrines of Neo-Platonism, and was won back to the ancient faith by the teaching of its professors.

What seems to us the reactionary attitude of the spiritualist school was dictated by the circumstances of its origin. A product of the great classical revival, its cause was necessarily linked with the civilisation of ancient Greece, and of that civilisation the worship of the old gods seemed to form an integral element. One need only think of the Italian Renaissance, with its predilection for the old mythology, to understand how much stronger and more passionate this feeling must have been among those to whom Greek literature still spoke in a living language, whose eyes, wherever they turned, still rested on the monuments, unrivalled, undesecrated, unfallen, unfaded, of Greek religious art. Nor was polytheism what some have imagined it to have been at this period, merely a tradition, an association, a dream, drawing shadowy sustenance from the human works and human thoughts which it had once inspired. To Plotinus and Proclus,

¹ *De Civit. Dei*, viii., 5. Augustine is speaking of the Platonists generally, but probably his ideas were derived from the school of Plotinus, whom, however, he never names.

as formerly to Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, the luminaries of day and night blazed down from heaven as animated and immortal witnesses of its truth. It was not simply that the heavens declared the glory of God ; to the pious beholder, they were visibly inhabited by glorious gods, and their constellated fires were, as Plotinus said, a scripture in which the secrets of destiny might be read.¹ The same philosopher scornfully asks the Gnostics, who, in this respect, were indistinguishable from the Christians, whether they were so infatuated as to call the worst men their brothers, while refusing that title to the sun ; and at a much later period, notwithstanding the heavy penalties attached to it, the worship of the heavenly bodies continued to be practised by the profoundest thinkers and scholars of the Neo-Platonic school.² Moreover, polytheism, by the very weakness and unfixedity of its dogmas, gave a much wider scope to independent speculation than could be permitted within the limits of the Catholic Church, just because Catholicism itself constituted a philosophical system in which all the great problems of existence were provided with definite and authoritative solutions.

The final defeat of polytheism proved, in some respects, an advantage to Neo-Platonism, by compelling it to exchange theological controversy for studies which could be prosecuted, at least for a time, without giving umbrage to the dominant religion. At Alexandria the new spiritualism was associated, on genuinely Platonic principles, with the teaching of geometry by the noble and ill-fated Hypatia. In all the Neo-Platonic schools, whether at Rome, at Alexandria, at Constantinople, or at Athens, the writings of Plato and Aristotle were attentively studied, and made the subject of numerous commentaries, many of which are still extant. This return to the two great masters of idealism was, as I have already said, the most valuable result of the metaphysical revival, and probably contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of their works amidst the general wreck of ancient philosophical literature. Finally, efforts were made to present the doctrine of Plotinus under a more popular or a more scientific form, and to develop it into systematic completeness.

Driven by Christian intolerance from every other centre of civilisation, Greek philosophy found a last refuge in Athens, where it continued to be taught through the whole of the fifth century and the first quarter of the sixth. During that period, all the tendencies already indicated as characteristic of

¹ *Enn.*, ii., 7.

² *Enn.*, ii., 9, 18, p. 217, C ; for Syrianus and Proclus, see Zeller, p. 738. The Emperor Constantine is said to have remained a sun-worshipper all his life (Vacherot, ii., p. 153) ; and even Philo Judaeus speaks of the stars as visible gods (Zeller, p. 393).

Neo-Platonism exhibited themselves once more, and contributed in about equal degrees to the versatile activity of its last original representative, Proclus (410-485). This remarkable man offers one of the most melancholy examples of wasted power to be found in the history of thought. Endowed with an enormous faculty for acquiring knowledge, a rare subtlety in the analysis of ideas, and an unsurpassed genius for their systematic arrangement, he might, under more favourable auspices, have been the Laplace or Cuvier of his age. As it was, his immense energies were devoted to the task of bringing a series of lifeless abstractions into harmony with a series of equally lifeless superstitions. A commentator both on Euclid and on Plato, he aspired to present transcendental dialectic under the form of mathematical demonstration. In his *Institutes of Theology*, he offers proofs equally elaborate and futile of much that had been taken for granted in the philosophy of Plotinus. Again, where there seems to be a gap in the system of his master, he fills it up by inserting new figments of his own. Thus, between the super-essential One and the absolute Nous, he interposes a series of henads or unities, answering to the multiplicity of intelligences or self-conscious Ideas which Plotinus had placed within the supreme Reason, or to the partial souls which he had placed after the world-soul. In this manner, Proclus, following the usual method of Greek thought, supplies a transition from the creative One to the Being which had hitherto been regarded as its immediate product; while, at the same time, providing a counterpart to the many lesser gods with which polytheism had surrounded its supreme divinity. Finally, as Plotinus had arranged all things on the threefold scheme of a first principle, a departure from that principle, and a subsequent reunion with it, Proclus divides the whole series of created substances into a succession of triads, each reproducing, on a small scale, the fundamental system of an origin, a departure, and a return. And he even multiplies the triads still further by decomposing each separate moment into a secondary process of the same description. For example, Intelligence as a whole is divided into Being, Life, and Thought, and the first of these, again, into the Limit, the Unlimited, and the absolute Existence (*οὐσία*), which is the synthesis of both. The Hegelian system is, as is well known, constructed on a similar plan; but while with Hegel the logical evolution is a progress from lower to higher and richer life, with Proclus, as with the whole Neo-Platonic school, and, indeed, with almost every school of Greek thought, each step forward is also a step downward, involving a proportionate loss of reality and power.

Thus Proclus was to Plotinus what Plotinus himself had been to Plato and Aristotle: that is to say, he stood one degree

further removed from the actual truth of things and from the spontaneity of original reflection. And what I have said about the philosophic position of the master may be applied, with some modification, to the claims of his most eminent disciple. From a scientific point of view, the system of Proclus is a mere mass of wearisome rubbish; from an aesthetic point of view it merits our admiration as the most comprehensive, the most coherent, and the most symmetrical work of the kind that antiquity has to show. It would seem that just as the architectural skill of the Romans survived all their other great gifts, and even continued to improve until the very last—the so-called temple of Minerva Medica being the most technically perfect of all their monuments—so also did the Greek power of concatenating ideas go on developing itself as long as Greece was permitted to have any ideas of her own.¹

The time arrived when this last liberty was to be taken away. In the year 529, Justinian issued his famous decree prohibiting the public teaching of philosophy in Athens, and confiscating the endowments devoted to the maintenance of its professors. It is probable that this measure formed part of a comprehensive scheme for completing the extirpation of paganism throughout the empire. For some two centuries past, the triumph of Christianity had been secured by an unsparing exercise of the imperial authority, as the triumph of Catholicism over heresy was secured with the aid of the Frankish sword. A few years afterwards, the principal representatives of the Neo-Platonic school, including Simplicius the famous Aristotelian commentator, repaired to the court of Khosru Nuschirvan, the King of Persia, with the intention of settling in his country for the rest of their lives. They were soon heartily sick of their adopted home. Khosru was unquestionably an enlightened monarch, greatly interested in Hellenic culture, and sincerely desirous of diffusing it among his people. It is also certain that Agathias, our only authority on this subject, was violently prejudiced against him. But it may very well be, as stated by that historian,² that Khosru by no means came up to the exaggerated expectations formed of him by the exiled professors. He had been described to them as the ideal of a Platonic ruler, and, like inexperienced bookmen, they accepted the report in good faith. They found that he cared a great deal more for scientific questions about the cause of the tides and the modifications superinduced on plants and animals by transference to a new environment, than about the metaphysics of the One.³ Moreover, the immorality

¹ It is only fair to mention that Mr. Whittaker in his *Neo-Platonists* takes a much more favourable view of Proclus than I do.

² Quoted by Ritter and Preller, pp. 567-8 (7th ed.).

³ Compare the report of Agathias with the series of questions put to Priscian,

of Oriental society and the corruption of Oriental government were something for which they were totally unprepared. Better, they thought, to die at once, so that it were but on Roman soil, than to live on any conditions in such a country as Persia. Khosru was most unwilling to lose his guests, but on finding that they were determined to leave him, he permitted them to depart, and even made it a matter of express stipulation with the imperial government that they should be allowed to live in their old homes without suffering any molestation on account of their religious opinions.¹

Simplicius continued to write commentaries on Aristotle after his return, and was even succeeded by a younger generation of Platonic expositors ; but before the end of the sixth century paganism was extinct, and Neo-Platonism, as a separate school of philosophy, shared its fate.

quoted in the Dissertation by Quicherat, prefixed to Dübner's edition of Priscian's *Solutiones* (printed after Plotinus in Didot's edition, pp. 549 *sqq.*).

¹ Vacherot says (ii., p. 400), without giving any authority for his statement, that the Neo-Platonists were driven from Persia by the persecution of the Magi ; and that they returned home 'furtivement,' which is certainly incorrect. They returned openly, under the protection of a treaty between Persia and Rome. (Zeller, p. 851.)

NOTE ON ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF TRAGIC EMOTION

A GENERATION ago, according to Zeller,¹ the number of treatises on the notion of Catharsis in Aristotle's *Poetics* already amounted to seventy. Including the views put forward in commentaries on that work and also in the general expositions of Aristotle given by historians of Greek philosophy the interpretations must by this time run up to at least a hundred. I have not read more than a small fraction of the literature in question, and it is possible that the views here to be put forward and arrived at by independent investigation may have been anticipated in some one or more of them; but as there is no reference to any such views in Prof. Bywater's very learned and judicious summing-up of the whole subject I have good reason for thinking that they are original to myself.

In the much controverted passage to which I am referring, Aristotle, as translated by Prof. Bywater, defines Tragedy as containing 'incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions.' Prof. Butcher translates *κάθαρσις* by 'purgation.' In my opinion 'fear' is too weak a rendering for *φόβος*, and I shall henceforth employ 'terror' instead.

Catharsis in the sense of purgation or a clearing out of undesirable matter occurs frequently in Aristotle's biological writings. Besides the passage quoted it is used once in the *Poetics*, but only in the sense of a religious purification (1455^b 15). Chapters vi. and vii. of the eighth Book of the *Politics* use the word in an aesthetic reference and on each occasion in a medical sense. The passages run as follows in Jowett's translation: (i.) 'The flute is not an instrument which has a good moral effect; it is too exciting. The proper time for using it is when the performance aims not at instruction but at relief of the passions' (*κάθαρσιν μᾶλλον ἢ μάθησιν*, 1341^b 23). (ii.) 'Music should be studied with a view to . . . (1) education, (2) purification (the word "purification" [*κάθαρσις*] we use at present without explanation, but when hereafter we speak of poetry, we will treat the subject with more precision); music may also serve (3) for intellectual enjoyment, for relaxation, and for recreation' (1341^b 37-41). (iii.) 'Feelings such as pity and fear (*φόβος*), or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy, whom we see disenthralled by the use of mystic melodies, which bring healing and purification to the soul' (*ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως*, 1342^a 3-11). (iv., continuing iii.)

¹ *Ph. d. Gr.*, ii., 2, p. 72, note 5 (3rd ed.).

'Those who are influenced by pity or fear (φόβος) and every emotional nature have a like experience, others in their degree are stirred by something which specially affects them, and all are in a manner purified (πᾶσι γίγνεσθαι τινα κάθαρσιν) and their souls lightened and delighted' (*ib.*, 11-15).

Aristotle's promise to give a more precise explanation of what he means by Catharsis is understood by Jowett to refer to the *Poetics*, where, however, he observes that 'the promise is really unfulfilled.' Others have suggested that it was fulfilled in the lost second book of that treatise, and Bernays thought he had hit on an unmistakable reference to the missing explanation in a work known as *De Mysteriis* and formerly, but not now, attributed to the Neo-Platonist philosopher Iamblichus. According to this writer 'human nature is subject to passions which are made more violent by complete suppression, but may safely and pleasurably be indulged by a moderate gratification. Thus by witnessing the representation of other people's passions in comedies and tragedies we restrain, moderate, and purge (ἀποκαθαίρομεν) our own.'¹ The theory that pseudo-Iamblichus quoted these words from, or that they reproduce the sense of Aristotle's lost explanation of the Catharsis is ingenious and plausible. But it is open to serious objections. The Peripatetic origin of the passage seems indeed unquestionable. But it might be taken from a defence of the master's doctrine by Theophrastus, or some other distinguished disciple, against some early Stoic criticism. For the association of comedy with tragedy as a source of pathos is quite inconsistent with the doctrine of the *Poetics*, whereas it might well be suggested by the sentimental comedy of Menander. It may be said that the extension of Aristotle's idea to the New Comedy does not disprove the Aristotelian origin of the context. And that is true; but there are other considerations tending to make the existence of the supposed elucidation of Catharsis in the lost book of the *Poetics* highly problematic.

To begin with, the promise made in the *Politics* of a future disquisition on poetry may not, and in my opinion does not, relate to our *Poetics* at all, but rather to a determination of the function of dramatic performances and of poetry generally in the projected but never completed sequel of Aristotle's ideal State. Possibly the Stagirite's ultimate conviction that the drama has for its proper object not to instruct but to please made him despair of finding a place for it in popular education. Moreover the definition of tragedy in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics* is remarkable not only for its careful drawing as a whole but also for the exactness with which the meaning of the terms involved is explained where an explanation seems to be required. 'By "language embellished" I mean language into which rhythm, "harmony," and song enter. By "the several kinds in separate parts," I mean that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song. . . . By "Diction" I mean the mere metrical arrangement of the words: as for "Song" it is a term whose sense every one understands' (1449^b 18 *sqq.*; Butcher's translation). Catharsis is silently omitted: it is neither

¹ Jacob Bernays, *Zwei Abhandlungen*, p. 40, Berlin, 1880.

named as something that all understand, nor is there a promise that it will be explained elsewhere.

In this difficulty I can only suggest that the explanation is to be sought for—and perhaps found—in the subsequent chapters, that Catharsis is in fact an effect of Character and Plot arranged with the object of eliminating pain and leaving pleasure as the end and the sole end of tragic representation.

Let me begin by observing that the homoeopathic treatment of diseases—assuming pity and terror to be diseases—finds no countenance in any part of Aristotle's philosophy. At least I have found nothing of the kind, nor to my knowledge do his modern commentators quote any passage to that effect. For the passage already quoted from the *Politics* about the purifying effect of certain musical strains on the passions—among which pity and terror are included—neither states nor implies that the action is homoeopathic. The passions are not first excited and then soothed. The right remedy, as we may gather, is at once to bring them to a mean. For in the same chapter Aristotle goes on to condemn the Platonic Socrates for recommending the Phrygian mode, on the ground that it is 'exciting and emotional.' 'All men agree that the Dorian music is the gravest and manliest. And whereas we say that extremes should be avoided and the mean followed, and whereas the Dorian is a mean between the other harmonies [the Phrygian and the Lydian], it is evident that our youth should be taught the Dorian music' (1342^b, Jowett's translation). And Dr. W. L. Newman tells us in his note on this passage that hellebore, the classic example of a cathartic medicine, was credited with the power of removing the worst elements and leaving the best.¹

Another important point is rightly to understand the way in which Aristotle supposes tragedy to excite the emotion of terror. With our way of thinking about dramatic representations we naturally conceive it as arising, so to speak, disinterestedly, like pity, from the sight of such experiences as the vision of Cassandra or the pursuit of Orestes by the Erinyes of Clytemnestra. Such a feeling has nothing selfish about it. In Aristotle's theory of tragic emotion, on the contrary, terror is purely selfish and arises from the apprehension of danger to ourselves.² And that is why the victim of tragic suffering must be—as Prof. Bywater translates the phrase—'an intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous or just'—fear being occasioned by the misfortune of one like ourselves (1453^a6). And the taint of this selfishness extends to pity. For, according to this philosopher, we only pity the victim of such a calamity. He defines the emotion as 'a pain for apparent evil, destructive or painful, befalling a person who does not deserve it, when we might expect such evil to befall ourselves or some of our friends, and when, moreover, it seems near' (*Rhetoric*, ii. 8, Jebb's translation). The friends, however, must not be too near, for in this case 'we feel as if we ourselves were threatened.' Now in Aristotle's theory the very object of tragic art is avowedly just this, to convert the actors into near friends for the purpose of inspiring

¹ *The Politics of Aristotle*, vol. iii., p. 564.

² Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, Sect. 74 sqq.

us with terror; and their very superiority to the audience in social station is used for that purpose. Among other appropriate methods for exciting fear—where it is desirable to rouse that passion—orators are advised in the *Rhetoric* to show 'that greater people than his hearers have suffered—and also that persons like them are suffering . . . and this from persons at whose hands they did not think to suffer, and in a way, and at a time, which they did not expect' (*ib.*, chap. v., sect. 15). Here Aristotle, a bookish man, is evidently thinking much more of the tragedies that he had read than of the speeches that he had heard.

Nor is this all. Pity for others after generating terror for ourselves is driven out by its own offspring. As Aristotle himself puts it in the *Rhetoric*, 'the dreadful is different from the piteous, and tends to drive out pity, and often serves to rouse its opposite' (*ib.*, chap. viii., sect. 12). As the Platonic Socrates says, we must follow the argument whithersoever it leads us—in this instance to the unexpected and unwelcome conclusion that the catharsis of tragic pity consists in its conversion into tragic terror. The purgation is not homoeopathic but allopathic. The much discussed phrase, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνονσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν, does not mean that these passions are severally purified by being stimulated to excess, nor yet by being directed towards worthy objects—nothing could be more unworthy than selfish terror—but pity, at any rate, is to be got rid of by conversion into its opposite.

But here a new difficulty arises. So far the result of the analysis has been to leave us alone with terror—in all cases a most unpleasant companion, and, one would think, a particularly bad bargain to take in exchange for pity. It might be suggested, not without plausibility, that by perpetual action and reaction each of these opposing passions might serve to neutralise the other, or rather, in the language of Aristotelian philosophy, to bring it to a mean. Such an explanation would agree with Lessing's theory of the catharsis, at least to the extent of understanding it as a reduction of the characteristic tragic emotions to a mean point, while leaving us uncommitted to his idea that Aristotle attributes the same sort of moral value to the mean in tragedy that he does in his *Ethics*. Indeed one fails to see how Lessing or any one else could think better of moderate fear than the extreme High Churchman in the story thought of a moderately chaste woman or of a moderately good egg. Pleasure, not edification, was what Aristotle considered the end of tragedy; and therefore the catharsis must be something that frees tragic emotions not of their excess but of their painful element. Now the fear or rather the terror induced by imagining that such calamities as those represented by Sophocles and Euripides may happen any day to ourselves is unmixedly painful, like the news of earthquake or cholera in a neighbouring country.

The idea of poetic justice as an Aristotelian postulate is now generally abandoned. From beginning to end of the *Poetics* such terms as τὸ δίκαιον and τὸ ἐπιεικές never occur in an ethical sense; while exceptionally virtuous or criminal characters are deliberately excluded from the ideal stage, so that there can be no question of an appropriate requital for the one or the other. Besides the tragic actors must not suffer for great crimes, as any exceptional wickedness would place them

outside the sympathies of the spectator, thus making the evolution of pity and terror impossible. Their calamities must be the result of some fatal error (*ἀμαρτία*) such as the man in the theatre might happen to commit himself. One may observe parenthetically that to class the acts of Clytemnestra, Polyneices, Jason, and Medea as simple errors, comparable to the parricide of Œdipus—if our critic really meant to do so—would show a singular bluntness of moral sensibility, and, what in this connexion would be even worse, a singular obtuseness to the meaning of the tragedians themselves. The act of Creon in forbidding the burial of Polyneices is not an error; it is a great crime against the divine law, and for that reason is justly visited with the divine vengeance. It is still further aggravated by the cruel punishment inflicted on Antigone; while Antigone herself suffers for what was not an error but an act of heroic virtue. There is not here, as Hegel vainly imagined, a tragic conflict of laws; the right, as Sophocles himself plainly shows, is all on one side.

What we are interested in, however, is not the ethics of Greek tragedy but the mechanism by which terror having been aroused is carried off. Aristotle is less explicit about this than about the machinery of character-drawing by which pity is converted into selfish terror, or rather he leaves it to be gathered from his rules for constructing a good plot. The purpose of a tragic plot is to explain the origin of that fatal error by which the piteous calamities of the hero were brought to pass. The analysis is wonderfully clever, and has made the reputation of the *Poetics* among modern critics. Indeed, Aristotle evidently became so interested in it himself that apparently the more essential problem of its relation to the catharsis got pushed out of sight. It seems to me that his original intention was to interpret the plot as a means of bringing home to the spectator how vain were his fears, seeing that such an extraordinary combination of circumstances as that which enmeshed, say, an Œdipus in its folds would be most unlikely to rope in the average Athenian citizen. Moreover in each instance the 'error' is an act of freewill involving a risk such as the average spectator would be most unlikely to run. In Antigone's place *he* would not resist the tyrant's decree. In the case of Philoctêtes *he* would not entrust his bow and arrows to Neoptolemus. In fact while, according to Aristotle, the characters and the action are brought well within the self-knowledge and experience of the ordinary spectator—that his pity may be turned into terror—so the same characters and the same action must, to all appearances, be raised high above his experience in order that terror may be turned back into pity, or neutralised by it, or shown to be an unreasonable apprehension. On this last hypothesis the peculiar pleasure caused by tragic representations would be neither the '*suave mari magno*' of Lucretius, nor Gray's 'snatching a fearful joy,' nor the satisfaction of the 'foolish (?) fat scullion' in *Tristram Shandy* at not being dead though others are, but the intellectual gratification resulting from the study of characters that are a skilful imitation of real life, and of incidents worked up into a complete and coherent whole. Throughout we find Aristotle's genius for systematisation, for naturalism, for logical classification and nomenclature displayed. And just as his cosmology puts the four elements in the centre or least honoured place of all, with their

law of transformability, balance, moderation, and mutual restraint, so in his aesthetic theory also the elemental emotions are kept in strict subordination to the creative and limiting interests of a scientifically constructed plot.

The *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* of the theory lies in its false psychology. Pity does not arise from the sympathetic apprehension of another's danger or pain or loss. It is the arrested impulse to run to the assistance of those in danger, just as fear is the arrested impulse to run away from danger, rising, in the case of utter inability, to terror. It is perfectly true that, as Aristotle says, the death of those very similarly situated to ourselves causes (at least in some instances) not pity but terror. This, however, does not apply to the victims of tragic catastrophes on the stage; the mere consciousness of artistic illusion, reinforced in the case of Greek tragedy by remoteness in time and space, besides great disparity in social rank, would effectually obviate any such danger. And Aristotle's theory of the catharsis seems to betray a dim consciousness on his part that such was the case; only whereas in his idea pity passes into personal fear and is relieved by plot interest, in reality pity becomes admiration where the characters are heroic like Philoctetes and the second Œdipus, becomes love where their first weakness is atoned for by repentant self-devotion as in Ismênê, Neoptolemus, and the Iphigenia at Aulis of Euripides. As regards the last Aristotle has given the measure of his critical capacity by censuring the character for inconsistency—a judgment to which, says Paley, 'it is difficult to attribute much weight.' It is of weight only as illustrating Aristotle's utter incompetence to deal with such matters. For, as Paley goes on to observe, 'the part of Iphigenia throughout appears singularly natural. Her first impulse is to live; but when she clearly perceives how much depends on her voluntary death, and how Achilles, her champion, is compromised by his dangerous resolve to save her; lastly how the Greeks are bent on the expedition from motives of national honour, she yields herself up a willing victim' (*Euripides*, vol. iii., p. 448). It is perhaps fortunate for the reputation of the Stagirite that he has not favoured us with similar observations on the characters of Ismênê and of Neoptolemus.

To sum up: the object of tragic art, according to Aristotle, is, first to excite pity by the representation of calamitous incidents, then by skilful character-drawing to replace pity by anxiety about our personal safety, and finally to relieve this by an appropriate adjustment of responsibilities and actions.

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